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ABSTRACT

The four 1990 issues of the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) Newsletter are gathered in this packet. The newsletters are published quarterly by the ALBSU for persons teaching in adult literacy, English as a Second Language, and basic skils programs; for persons responsible for funding and organizing such programs; and for those who are generally interested in these areas. The following articles are found in the Winter 1990 edition: "The Shape of Things to Come?"; "Link into Learning"; "The Literacy Gap"; "The Problems of the Long-Term Student"; and "Initial Assessment in Employment Training." The Spring edition contains these articles: "'Stanley and Iris'--Hollywood Discovers Literacy"; "Numeracy in the Basic Skills Accreditation Initiative"; "Genre and Process"; "Basic Education Support in an FE (Further Education) Setting"; and "Kenneth Brooksbank." The Summer edition contains the following: "Setting the Agenda in the 1990s"; "Learning to Learn in Adult Basic Education"; "Literacy in Bhopal"; "Training and Enterprise Councils and Adult Basic Education"; and "English for Speakers of Other Languages: Mixed Ability Groups." In the Autumn issue are these articles: "Expanding Provision--Improving Practice"; "Assessing Bilingual Adults for Training"; "Reading Aloud--or Not?"; "The Inprint Initiative"; and "ILY (International Literacy Year) in Xiamen." All four issues also contain book reviews and short news items. (KC)

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ALBSU

Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit

NEWSLETTER

Nos. 36-39

1990

Adult Literacy & Basic Skills Unit
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WINTER
1990

No 36

NEWSLETTER

ALBSU

Adult Literacy & Basic Skills Unit

Photo: Peter Ward

Tracey Armstrong, student, Leeds Open Learning Centre, Rt. Hon. John McGregor MP, Secretary of State for Education and Science, Pam Exley, student, Denis Healey Centre, Leeds and Neale Prendergast, student, Rhyl Open Learning Centre, at the launch of International Literacy Year.

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THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME?

It is common at the beginning of a decade (and there is some dispute as to whether 1990 or 1991 is the beginning of the 1990s) to try to predict the shape of things to come. Basic education survived in the 1980s, despite the cuts in public expenditure which marked the early eighties, and to some extent even prospered. Certainly basic skills work has a higher profile in most areas at the beginning of the 1990s than it had at the beginning of the 1980s. International Literacy Year 1990 should give us the impetus to ensure that basic education is a major priority in the next decade.

At the end of the 1970s basic skills work was very much seen as yesterdays' 'good cause'. The very success of the adult literacy campaign in the mid-1970s had contributed to funders and decision makers in both central and local government thinking of adult literacy as a short-term need where quick solutions were likely to be effective. It is not surprising that this view did not encourage the development of a long-term strategy. ALBSU was established as a short-term agency in succession to two previous short-term units and very little planning of the development of basic skills provision was apparent either nationally or locally. Certainly up to 1985, it was very difficult to address some of the medium and long-term issues which had arisen.

Recognition that basic skills provision is likely to be a continuing need has led to greater security and allowed stronger emphasis to be placed on planning. Moreover, basic skills work has increasingly been seen as the essential underpinning provision which is fundamental to success and progression in education and training. Most Local Education Authorities now recognise basic skills work as a discipline in its own right, with its own approaches, specialisms and philosophy, rather than being seen merely as a part of general, non-vocational adult education in much the same way as leisure or recreational classes.

Funding has improved in most areas largely because of a judicious blend of central funding for development, either through ALBSU or as part of wider government programmes such as Education Support Grants, and increased local support for the expansion of learning opportunities. There has also been a greater recognition that a high quality service cannot be developed and maintained on the exploitation of paid staff and that the use of volunteers is not a cheap option which does away with the need for paid staff. That is not to say that funding problems do not still exist. Too little money is spent on basic skills work and it's not surprising, therefore, that the range of opportunities is still too narrow in most places, demand often outstrips provision and that the quality of what is available cannot be guaranteed.

ERODING THE SERVICE

Changes in the education system in the last few years are likely to have a major effect on basic skills work in the 1990s. These changes could lead to an erosion of what has been built up in recent years or, more optimistically, basic education could be further strengthened and developed if changes are made to work in the best interests of those who want help to improve crucial skills such as reading, writing or basic maths.

The most pessimistic scenario would see basic education opportunities reduce drastically as 'numbers' and 'cost' become the only criteria used to judge the effectiveness and efficiency of education. Unrealistic staff/student ratios, increased pressure on staff non-contact time and a view of all continuing and further education as essentially the same will make it difficult, if not impossible, for basic skills work to be maintained at the current level let alone to be developed. Basic education will be seen as 'expensive' compared to more traditional further education courses and with scarce resources and rigid 'performance indicators', there will be little incentive to develop better provision.

Many Schemes of Delegation (the plans LEAs have to submit to central government about how they propose to administer colleges of further education in the future) envisage that adult education provision will be made on a cost recovery basis and increasingly, in some areas, adult education will be effectively privatised. Certainly basic education – a service which is not based on recovering the costs involved by charging high fees – may find itself uncomfortably placed in a market forces, demand-led, high fees adult education service.

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

ALBSU takes a more optimistic view of the future, however. Basic education is increasingly recognised as crucial to the economic performance of the UK as well as important for the social health of our society. Access to opportunities will mean little if a significant proportion of people cannot take advantage of them because of lack of access to opportunities to master crucial skills such as literacy and numeracy. People in basic education have long realised this; increasingly employers, trainers, other educationalists and politicians are reaching the same conclusion.

In early January a reception to mark the beginning of International Literacy Year was held at the House of Lords, hosted by

Lord Plowden and Baroness Carnegy of Lour. Speaking at this reception the Rt Honorable John McGregor, Secretary of State for Education and Science, reinforced the key role of literacy in the 1990's. He said:-

"Literacy is not easy to define or measure. In common with almost all industrialised societies, the challenge we face in this country is not that of illiteracy, since very few adults are totally unable to read or write, but of functional illiteracy.

People experiencing such difficulties are at a cruel disadvantage in engaging fully in the activities for which literacy is required for effective functioning in modern society. A lack of competence in the skills most of us take for granted implies not only a loss of personal confidence, but a loss to society and the economy as a whole. It is vitally important that such loss should be remedied."

It will be important that the new Training Enterprise Councils (TECs) which are currently being established see the importance of basic skills training and support as part of programmes for unemployed young people and adults and in workplace courses.

Facing the 1970s will not be good enough, however, as we enter a very different decade and the basic education service at the turn of the century will need to be different from the service which began to develop more than a decade ago. Change will not necessarily be rapid or mean that the essential philosophy of basic education will disappear. Rather, many of the changes already underway will come to fruition in the next few years and our basic philosophy will be strengthened.

Certainly basic skills work will not be able to exempt itself from the kind of judgments being made about effectiveness and efficiency which are a feature of most other parts of the education service. There is nothing fundamentally reactionary about wanting 'value for money' nor anything particularly liberal about being in favour of waste. The more we waste the less provision there will be and the poorer it will be in quality.

What we will need, however, are performance indicators which are based on the aims and objectives of basic skills work and methods of evaluation which are sensitive to the needs of a service providing for the least educationally advantaged in our society. This does not mean that hard edged statistics such as enrolment rates, attendance patterns, progress rates, staff/student ratios and cost will not be important, but that the judgments made and the targets set need to recognise the nature of basic skills work.

We will also need to 'unpack' some of the terminology of basic education such as 'student centred', 'negotiated learning' and 'informal assessment'. Sometimes this is little more than fashionable rhetoric rather than what actually happens and much basic education is still based on what the tutor wants rather than on planning which involves the student. Informal assessment is often little more than an excuse for no assessment!

A CONTINUING PRIORITY

There will also need to be a considerable expansion in the number of learning opportunities available in the next decade. Current provision is too limited in scale and little substantial growth has taken place in recent years. Growth will undoubtedly mean that there will need to be an increase in the amount of money available for basic skills work if the quality of what is to be provided is not to suffer. There is no cheap way to provide high quality basic education and spending undue time attempting to reduce realistic costs will be largely a waste of time.

Open learning centres will add a much needed flexibility and choice to basic skills work but it is foolish to think that they will be a cheap alternative to more 'traditional' methods of provision. They are a start, however, in providing tuition in attractive surroundings (rather than in the very worst rooms), with good modern resources, (rather than old fashioned technology) and accessible locations (rather than the annexe at the back of the building).

Much of the growth in basic education provision will come, the Unit believes, through specialised programmes such as workplace courses, basic skills support for further education college students, provision as part of training and retraining programmes and work with particularly disadvantaged groups. Single purpose, 'dedicated' basic skills provision will also expand and, hopefully, offer a range of learning opportunities for every potential student. LEAs will need to recognise (as some already do) that their role will be to provide support, advice and training for other providers as well as to make some provision themselves, rather than see themselves as *the* provider essentially in competition with others in the area.

Staff development and training will be recognised as one important factor in improving the quality of provision and staff appraisal will be a feature in most areas. If properly used appraisal can be a very effective way of supporting staff at the 'sharp end' as well as helping them to identify their training needs. The coherent system of staff training now being developed will have an important part to play in improving quality.

Accreditation of learning will also be a choice for every student. It will be increasingly important that basic skills students are able to receive credit for what they have achieved and possess 'currency' in an increasingly competitive environment. The right kind of accreditation should enable not disable.

What is certain is that for basic skills provision to be a continuing priority in the 1990's none of us will be able to relax and rely merely on hope and good will. Nor can a central unit alone demonstrate that provision is effective, represents 'value for money' and needs to be further developed. Aggressive marketing and positive action will be needed by all of us if the kind of service every student deserves is to become a reality throughout England and Wales in the next decade.

"Literacy is not easy to define or measure. In common with almost all industrialised societies, the challenge we face in this country is not that of illiteracy, since very few adults are totally unable to read or write, but of functional illiteracy.

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The Rt Honourable John McGregor
Secretary of State for Education and Science

LINK INTO LEARNING

Photo: Ron Cuff

Janet Anderson: Outreach

In a large, rural authority with a low key ABE service how do you move to learner centred, flexible and forward looking provision? Janet Anderson, County Co-ordinator for Cornwall, describes formidable progress in the South West.

There was no Grand Opening – it crept gradually upon us, but once it had arrived, we certainly knew the difference! Cornwall Adult Basic Education (CABE) has undergone a transformation over the past two years.

Setting the scene

Prior to January 1988, a restrictive budget resulted in part time co-ordinators running a low-key service, appreciating the limitations of working either in schools in the evenings or trying to support 1:1 provision on very few hours. Control over what was actually taught rested with volunteer tutors (VTs) who had received very little training.

Unabated pressure for change from within CABE, backed by Alan Wells, ALBSU, resulted in an increased budget from the County, the appointment of a County Co-ordinator from within the existing team, and an ALBSU Local Development Project.

The Morley College Independent Learning Project (English) was a major influence, and was seen as a basis for the philosophy behind the project.

Key aims

These were identified:

- improvements in provision should be county-wide
- change of emphasis from tutor-to student-directed learning through a negotiated learning programme
- flexible learning opportunities in an adult environment, properly supported and monitored
- good quality, appropriate learning materials, easily selected by students.

Getting started

An administrative system was established. Three part-time project workers (already part-time co-ordinators) were appointed, and a central office/project workbase, with clerical assistance, was set up.

We examined the student learning path from initial contact with CABE. The existing system of interview, followed by linking a student with a VT and leaving them to work along a suggested course with occasional monitoring, had not been without success. However, it had also bred students with a considerable degree of tutor-dependence. Redressing the balance of control was vital.

Appreciating the difficulties students had in knowing precisely what they wanted, a card sort pack* was developed which asked questions such as 'Would you like to improve your spelling?' or 'Do fractions concern you?'. These cards could be sorted by the student, through discussion if s/he wished, into two piles, – 'Want to take futher' and 'Not interested'. A learning programme would be drawn up by the student and co-ordinator together, identifying priorities and steps by which the target could be reached. A review date for monitoring, which the VT would usually attend, would be decided and a new learning target would then be established.

To stress the belief in the need for students to be involved in planning and evaluating their own learning, sheets were designed (and re-designed – many times!) which could be used regularly both to evaluate progress and plan the next session.

The student control element was further encouraged by the development and use of a Student Introductory Handbook. This gives students essential information about their centre and promotes the feeling of belonging to Link Into Learning.

The quest for materials

Suitable user friendly materials which would enable students to take control of their own learning were sought.

It was felt that many existing materials:

- aimed at helping tutors to teach, rather than 'speaking' to students directly
- were individualised worksheets
- were not easy for students to find.

CABE staff, VTs and students identified 26 skills and topic areas commonly sought by students.

Trying it out

Project workers wrote material for two topic areas to a common format. This was very time consuming, and the results were disappointing. Therefore, it was decided to concentrate on developing presentation and access systems necessary to enable students to work directly from published material.

Suitable existing books and worksheets were categorised accordingly, and samples of additional material were collected, evaluated and included.

Use of photocopiers was negotiated and new ones purchased. Advice on copyright was sought and new material produced to fill any gaps. Computer software was evaluated, a set of disks produced from copyright-free material, and other software added as appropriate.

An access and presentation system for student materials was developed, based on a rack of Banker's Boxes, each box containing materials for one study package, a contents list, and a learning skills 'mindmap'. Packages were cross referenced to the card sorts used in the initial targeting exercise.

Materials were now available – but finding suitable premises to use them throughout the county was not without its problems! Eventually by extending the use of existing premises and finding some new ones, (particularly libraries, which could be used in the evenings when closed to the public) twenty four study centres were established. Twelve of these were main centres with the full range of materials, photocopying and computer facilities. The other twelve were mini (and in some cases

*Computerised version for BBC Micro available price £5.00 from Mrs Janet Anderson, County Co-ordinator for ABE, Mid-Cornwall College of Further Education, West Hill Annexe, St. Austell PL25 5ET.

portable) centres, used in outlying rural areas or in work with Training Agency schemes.

Spreading the word

Comprehensive publicity was initiated and is ongoing. An exhibition, posters, articles in newspapers and magazines, visits to outside agencies to give talks and distribute publicity materials – all these were pursued relentlessly. Bookmarks have been scattered in libraries and also Self Study packs, which comprise worksheets on various topics inside a folder which details the free service offered. Local radio gave us coverage daily for a week, culminating in a phone-in with project workers answering questions. The county magazine, containing articles by students, has appeared in doctors' and dentists' waiting rooms.

Link Into Learning has been successfully marketed to Employment Training Managers and Youth Training Schemes. Besides provision for trainees, many tutors from other agencies have enrolled on training to support this style of learning. An open learning tutor study facility has been included in main study centres.

Reaching out

It takes at least two and a half hours to travel the ninety miles from Lands End to the Devon border – communications in Cornwall are not in the super league! Considering this, appreciating the lack of public transport in rural areas, and the inherent reluctance to admit to needing help with basic skills when living in a small community, making Link Into Learning available throughout the county has been a formidable task. The CABE team has been enormously stretched, and whilst appreciating that there are still many refinements to be made to the study packages, outreach activities have been planned, targeting specific sections of the population not previously reached, using contacts with existing local organisations where possible.

Evaluation

Project workers are continuing to review developments and further refine the study packages, appreciating this is a large task that will take some time to accomplish. The packages have also been reappraised in the light of student and tutor evaluation. This indicates that the packages are well balanced, and users appreciate the flexibility of Link Into Learning.

VTs working away from centres find the mini study centres a valuable resource base. The corresponding increased contact with these tutors has made supporting and monitoring this provision more manageable.

The full impact of publicity has yet to be evaluated, but the immediate response has been positive. The appeal of our provision has been greatly enhanced by the adoption of the name "Link Into Learning". Knowledge of the service and the breadth of provision is increasing, and more students on other courses are seeking specific back-up. The perception of our service by the local authority and outside agencies has been enhanced, and our help and support is being sought from various directions.

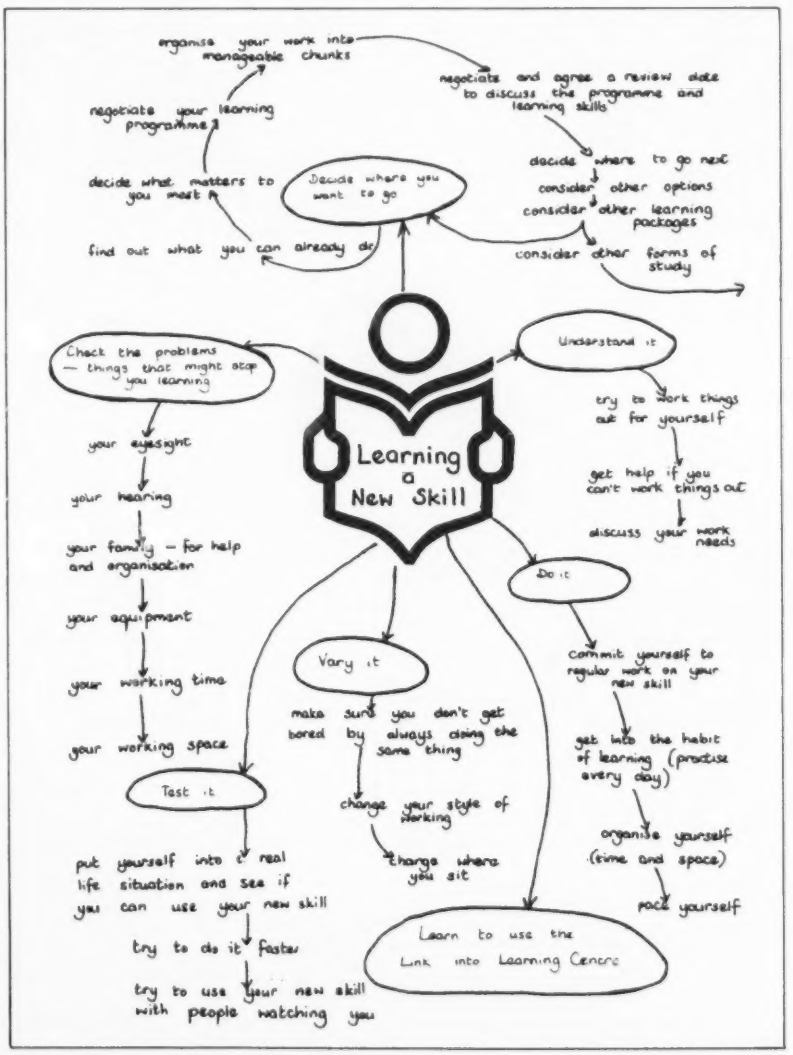
What next?

Further reviewing of the study packages is anticipated following evaluation and the availability of new materials. Provision to accommodate the specific needs of vocational students is being pursued, together with our ability to meet the challenge of the Wordpower Certificate. Workplace training is about to begin, and it is hoped that CABE will be more directly involved in Initial Training in the future. Research into the basic skills need of F.E. students has begun.

Active promotion of Link Into Learning will continue, for it is confirmed that throughout the county, students are benefiting from high quality, flexible provision. Plans are in hand for the further development of outreach activities and an increasingly proactive approach to break down barriers in tightly knit communities.

Student evaluation

My life has taken off in a more positive direction now that I have become a student with a local open learning centre . . . The idea behind this learning process . . . gives a broader look at a person's potential with a view to turning the end result into a better education. I can't speak highly enough of Link Into Learning, for as well as being a useful exercise in improving one's education, it can also be seen as a meeting of minds where we share in each other's learning experiences.


Learning a New Skill
organise your work into manageable chunks
negotiate and agree a review date to discuss the programme and learning skills
decide where to go next
consider other options
consider other learning packages
consider other forms of study
Understand it
try to work things out for yourself
get help if you can't work things out
discuss your work needs
Do it
commit yourself to regular work on your new skill
get into the habit of learning (practise every day)
organise yourself (time and space)
pace yourself
Learn to use the Link into Learning Centre
Vary it
make sure you don't get bored by always doing the same thing
change your style of working
change where you sit
Test it
put yourself into a real life situation and see if you can use your new skill
try to do it faster
try to use your new skill with people watching you
Check the problems – things that might stop you learning
your eyesight
your hearing
your family – for help and organisation
your equipment
your working time
your working space
find out what you can already do
decide what matters to you most
negotiate your learning programme
Decide where you want to go

THE LITERACY GAP

To close it – and to open the eyes of millions of workers – U.S. companies are spending hundreds of millions every year as educators of last resort.

International Literacy Year offers an opportunity to learn from developments in other countries. Whilst workplace literacy has been developed since 1978 in this country, through Workbase, employers have yet to recognise its importance, and match this with the investment of time and money, on the scale of their American counterparts. This article by Christine Gorman (with reports from Mike Cannell and D Blake Hallanan), first published in Time Magazine, surveys basic skills work in American companies.

THE PROFICIENCY GAP

Anyone who has hired new employees or tried to retrain veteran ones is painfully aware of the problem. As much as a quarter of the American labour force – anywhere from 20 million to 27 million adults – lacks the basic reading, writing and maths skills necessary to perform in today's increasingly complex job market. One out of every four teenagers drops out of high school, and of those who graduate, one out of every four has the equivalent of an eigth-grade education. How will they write, or even read, complicated production memos for robotized assembly lines? How will they be able to fill backlogged service orders? Already the skills deficit has cost businesses and taxpayers $20 billion in lost wages, profits and productivity. For the first time in American history, employers face a proficiency gap in the work force so great that it threatens the well-being of hundreds of U.S. companies.

More and more American corporations have responded to the literacy crisis by adding school bells to their time clocks. In the past decade, the price tag for remedial employee training in the three Rs has reached $300 million a year. More than half of Fortune 500 companies have become educators of last resort. As a result, employees are cracking the books as never before, even during work hours.

At an annual cost of $750,000, Aetna Life and Casualty teaches 500 employees basic reading, writing and arithmetic in its gleaming eight-story Institute for Corporate Education in Hartford. Since 1982 the General Motors Truck and Bus Group plant in Flint Township, Michigan, has offered its 3,000 workers high school classes and one-on-one tutoring in a cluster of rooms overlooking the shop floor. The centre has granted 14 high school diplomas so far.

THE RESPONSE

Taking up where school systems leave off, companies have travelled two different paths in the quest for improved literacy. Smaller firms have tended to rely on local educational resources, such as community colleges and volunteer tutors, to set up programmes that will help their workers bridge the skills gap. Getting employees to stick with classes can be difficult, however, since the sessions are frequently held away from the workplace after hours. Larger companies, which command the resources to hold classes in-house, have sweetened the deal by offering workers time off during the workday to attend. Success in both cases depends on how strongly individual companies support their programmes – and how effectively they defuse workers' fears about getting fired for owning up to sub-par literacy.

NEW DEMANDS

The problem is not just large numbers of people who are insufficiently educated. Never before have the majority of American jobs placed so many demands on employees. To compete effectively, the average American worker today must employ skills at a ninth-to-twelfth-grade level, in contrast to the typical fourth-grade standard during World War II. "It's not that people are becoming less literate."

RAISING THE STANDARD

POLAROID

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

1,000 new and veteran employees take courses in English and Maths.

$700,000

UNISYS

MISSION VIEJO, CALIFORNIA

125 workers are taught to read, write and speak English.

$150,000

PLANTERS NUTS

SUFFOLK, VIRGINIA

Classes for improving reading, and writing skills are attended by 48.

$40,000

HEWLETT PACKARD

SPOKANE, WASHINGTON

Some 30 production supervisors learn High School maths.

$22,000

points out Irwin Kirsch, a senior research psychologist working for the Educational Testing Service in Princeton, New Jersey. "It's that we keep raising the standards."

In the past, an expanding labour pool allowed business to satisfy its growing demands for skilled workers by skimming off the top. But since the baby boom ended in the mid-1960s, the number of 16-to-24-year-olds in the work force has dropped from 22.4 million in 1979 to 20.2 million last year. Most of the growth will be among minorities – the very groups that have been served least well by public shool systems. Over the next decade, blacks, Hispanics and Asians, who may speak English very poorly, will make up more than half of all entry-level employees.

U.S. car makers are leading the search for skilled, literate workers. General Motors devotes more than 15 per cent of the $170 million it spends yearly on job training to remedial education. In an attempt to match the quality of many foreign manufacturers, Detroit's Big Three carmakers joined the United Auto Workers in 1982 to create a comprehensive education and training programme. At Ford Motor Co. alone, more than 8,500 of 106,000 blue-collar workers have since enrolled in basic-skills classes at the company's 50 learning centres in plants nationwide. Says Ford chairman Donald E. Petersen: "The prosperity of our business will depend on our ability to operate more and more like a learning enterprise."

The point is not lost on the rank and file. Jane Conrad, 45, a $14-an-hour GM press operator, missed out on a supervisor's job because she had not finished high school. So the mother of six enrolled in GM's Flint Township Learning Lab this year. Subjects included a thorough review of fractions, reading comprehension and English literature. Conrad, who received a high school diploma this summer, is concerned about the increasing demands of automation at the plant. Says she: "If you don't have the basic training, some of it can be hard to keep up with."

BUSINESS IS WAKING UP . . .

Some unions have been in the education business for decades. In New York City, locals of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees started teaching basic skills to their members in the late 1960s, when a group of nurses' aides without high school degrees asked for help. Today approximately 15 per cent of its 20,000 member-students enroll in fundamental literacy and maths courses each year. "The problem was always there," says Katherine Schrier, director of the union's Education Trust Fund. "Business is just now waking up to it."

The shock has been particularly strong in the service industries. At American Express, which expects to fill 75,000 entry-level positions in the next five years, profits depend on good customer relations. Says Amex President Lou Gerstner, whose company spends $10 million annually to teach its new workers basic English and social skills: "I lie awake at night wondering where I'm going to find well-qualified employees for the future." Even the art of cooking requires more of workers than ever before. Last year Domino's Pizza of Ann Arbor, Michigan, discovered that its fledgling bakers had trouble understanding its dough-making manuals. Now it spends $50,000 on a reading programme, heavily seasoned with lessons on cuisine chemistry.

Since three out of every five new jobs in the economy are created by companies with fewer than 500 employees, small businesses suffer as severely as their corporate brethren. Bill Gregory, who owns Gregory Forest Products Sawmill in Glendale, Oregon, (pop. 870), did not know he had a problem on his hands until one of his 400 employees noticed that a forklift operator took forever to count loads of lumber. A bit of digging disclosed that about ten per cent of the mill's workers needed help developing proficiency in maths and English. So, at a cost of $15,000, Gregory asked the nearby Umpqua Community College to provide instruction. Says he: "We're spending millions of dollars to modernize the mill. It just didn't make sense to pay for that without providing training for basic skills as well."

HUMAN CAPITAL

Reading, writing and arithmetic, however, are just the beginning. Today's jobs also require greater judgement on the part of workers. Clerks at Hartford's Travelers insurance company no longer just type endless claim forms and pass them along for approval by someone else. Instead they are expected to settle a growing number of minor claims on the spot with a few deft punches of the computer keyboard. Now, says Bob Fenn, director of training at Travelers: "Entry-level clerks have to be capable of using information and making decisions."

On-the-job education has allowed some companies to tap the current wave of immigration – the largest since World War I – for skilled workers. Blue-collar employees at the Orange County, California, division of Unisys, for example, speak everything from Korean to Japanese to Spanish. Their productivity improved significantly, Unisys managers say, when the company began offering ten-week courses in reading, writing and speaking English. Classes, which number 15 students at most, meet in the company cafeteria, whose wrap-around picture windows look out on the Santa Ana Mountains. "Before I took the class I couldn't stand up and talk in our Thursday staff meetings," says Elvia Adame, 31, who came to Southern California from Mexico City eight years ago. "Now I participate in all the meetings."

Of course, better-skilled workers do not guarantee profits. Economic policy, trade agreements, technology, labour costs all play a role. But progress still depends on people who can communicate effectively, calculate accurately and act conclusively. "You can make the exchange rate anything you want," say American Express's Gerstner. "If you don't have the human capital to equal or exceed your competitors, you will fall behind." The report cards are out, and businesses are going to great lengths to make the grade.

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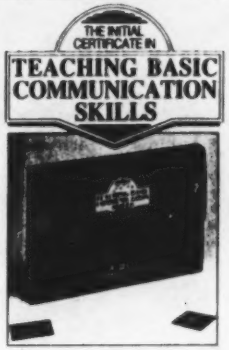


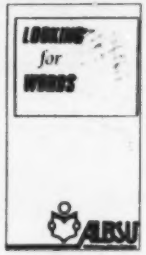
The Materials Pack is intended for trainers offering the Initial Certificate in Teaching Basic Communication Skills (ALBSU/City and Guilds 9282). The pack contains:

- eleven booklets for use in training sessions on the course
- the Scheme Handbook
- a section including the eight assignments, and
- a separate section of handouts and worksheets for use in training sessions and suitable for photo-copying.

The pack was produced by Jenny Brown as part of an ALBSU project and includes examples of materials used by trainers in Schemes throughout England and Wales.

£15.00 per pack
post and packing: 1 copy £2.30, 5 copies £3.95, 10 copies £5.50

A series of short colour videos will be available in the summer of 1990. The videos are designed to support the Initial Certificate in Teaching Basic Communication Skills.



Looking for Words

This video, recently commissioned by ALBSU, focuses on a number of case studies of students relating to the three themes for International Literacy Year:-

- **Work and Literacy**
- **Youth and Literacy**
- **Parents and Literacy**

Looking for Words lasts 30 minutes.

Price £15.00

There are also three shorter versions of the video:–

- *Getting on with the Job* (10 mins) concentrates on work and literacy; price £8.00
- *The Choice is Yours*, (9½ mins) concentrates on youth and literacy; price £8.00
- *Sharing the Future*, (7½ mins) concentrates on parents and literacy; price £8.00

Post and packing:
1 copy 63p 4 copies £2.52

The video was made in Hammersmith, West London; Leeds; Liverpool; Newham, East London; Rhyl, Clwyd.

Information

Message by HRH The Princess Royal

One of the curious paradoxes of my travels overseas is the enthusiasm for education that I encounter in countries where only primary schooling is compulsory and secondary education a luxury. Children seem to understand the importance of the three R's – the liberating phenomenons that are literacy and numeracy. Why is it, I wonder, can we not generate the same understanding and enthusiasm here?

Some of you may be surprised, but many will not be, to know that an estimated six million adults still have difficulty with these communication skills and their children may well miss out too.

I can understand the desire to be independent and earn your own wage, as well as the age old attitude to the discipline of learning and that the relevance of being able to read, write and count is not always obvious – until later in life. But – it is never too late to learn and the work of the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit makes it possible for everyone, of whatever age, to take full advantage of the broad horizons that learning to read and write can give you. To share their children's books, to unravel the potential in bus and train timetables, to apply for better jobs and to enjoy a more satisfying leisure time, through book, travel or new hobbies.

As Patron, may I offer my very best wishes for the successful outcome of International Literacy Year in the UK 1990 and that awareness of the campaign will encourage and enthuse everyone to experience the sense of freedom, satisfaction and reward that can be achieved through literacy.

Anne

Basic Skills Accreditation Initiative

BBC Spring Output

The Radio and Television output supporting the Basic Skills Accreditation Initiative continues into 1990.

Television – Step up to Wordpower

This continues with more practical help and guidance for viewers wanting to improve their reading, writing and communication skills at foundation and Stage I levels of the City and Guilds Communication Skills Certificate. Notes with details of the programmes' contents are available from:

Room 410, BBC Education,
London W5 2PA

Sundays 11.30-11.55 BBC1
14th January – 25th March
29th April – 27th May

In Wales the series will be broadcast the following week, at 6.10pm on BBC2.
The series is repeated Wednesdays 12.55 – 1.20 BBC2 from 17th January.
(Transmission times vary: check Radio Times for details)

Radio – Using your Wordpower

This series, first broadcast Autumn 1989, is being repeated. It is aimed at tutors and trainers, and looks at ways of teaching reading, writing and oracy skills within the content of the Basic Skills Accreditation Initiative. There are examples of good practice from classes around the country.

Notes to accompany the series are available on receipt of a large SAE from:

"Using your Wordpower"
BBC Education, London W5 2PA

Saturdays 5.00 – 5.30
Radio 4FM Options:
17th February – 17th March (next day 7.00 - 7.30pm).

"Using your Wordpower" will be followed by a repeat of "Wordpower Writing".

By Word of Mouth

Published with assistance from ALBSU to accompany the recent Channel 4 series, this booklet contains articles and examples of stories by story tellers from widely different cultures who are passing on this oral tradition in the UK today.

Available from: By Word of Mouth,
PO Box 4000, London W3 6XJ

Please send a cheque/postal order for £3.00 per copy, payable to Channel 4 Television.

90 SUMMER SCHOOL

ALBSU will hold the third Summer School on 16-20 July, at Nottingham University. The aim of the event is "to provide a range of activities to enable participants to develop and improve their knowledge of good practice in basic education and English for Speakers of other languages."

Within the overall theme of ILY, there will be a range of practical workshops on topics including "New Approaches", "Managing ABE", "Assessment, Monitoring and Accreditation" and "Learning from other countries", as well as social activities.

Accommodation/meal costs:
Monday to Friday £95.00;
24 hours: £24.00;
Non-residential, one day: £10.00;
Non-residential, Monday to Friday £45.00.

A crèche will be available. Booking forms from ALBSU.

New Readers

Two further titles for beginner readers are now available.

Not Just Singing and Dancin'

by Frank Forde, Lennah Hall & Virginia McLean

The third title in the Black Makers of History Series is about Black People in the Arts, choosing nine people from six countries.

Price: £1.75 plus p+p. 1 copy 45p; 5 copies £1.80; 10 copies £3.45.

Hats

by Julia Holt, Jane Mann and Karen Beggs.

A collection of short stories about the lives of women today.

Price: £1.60 plus p+p. 1 copy 37p; 5 copies £1.55; 10 copies £2.95. Available from ALBSU.

New Readers II

Chillers

A series of five books full of tension and suspense. Each book contains two short stories with illustrations.

Price: £1.50 each, or the set of five for £6.50 plus p+p. 1 copy 15p; 5 copies 28p. Available from ALBSU.

Chillers is the first of a number of readers produced by ALBSU with publishers Hodder and Stoughton. Further titles will be available later into the year.

Rt. Hon. Michael Heseltine, MP and Tricia Wormald, Advisory Lecturer for Basic Education Oxfordshire LEA, at the official opening of the ABLE Open Learning Centre in Littlemore on 24 November 1989.

Photo: Oxford and County Newspapers

THE PROBLEMS OF THE LONG-TERM STUDENT

Literacy schemes are reluctant to turn people away. Typically, they attempt to meet the needs of everyone who comes, and to make them welcome for as long as they want to stay. This can create problems for the scheme.

Also, importantly, it is not always in the best interests of students and potential students. Caroline Warburton, Project Co-ordinator at 'Open Door' Northumberland, describes how they faced up to these issues.

Do you have students who seem to have been coming along for years and years? So do we; in fact, I'm sure that many centres do. The problem is that they become firm friends of the Centre, and ourselves, but are we really giving these students the best service that we can? Are we building up false hopes and aspirations for the future? I would like to share with you some ideas that we have had at 'Open Door' in Prudhoe, Northumberland, to overcome some of these problems. First though, perhaps I should tell you about 'Open Door'.

'OPEN DOOR'

'Open Door' was set up as a result of a two year ALBSU/LEA funded project. It is based in Prudhoe which is an ex-mining town situated 11 miles west of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, in the beautiful county of Northumberland, and it has a rapidly growing population of about 12,000. Prudhoe also has a long-stay hospital for people with mental handicaps and many of these people are being placed in community homes within the area. Prior to the start of the project, I offered one two hour session per week for 'Adult Literacy' which was held on a Wednesday evening in the Sixth Form Centre at the local High School. The advent of the project meant a welcome increase in staffing to two part-time tutors, part-time secretarial help and our own centre. Because of this we have been able to offer a far wider service to the community. It also gave us the opportunity to take a critical look at some of our long-term students and in particular the Wednesday evening group. I am not keen to categorise students, everyone is an individual with his or her own strengths and weaknesses. Nevertheless when we looked at our long-term students (these are people who had been attending regularly for more than three years), we found that a significant number had a mental and-or a social handicap. We also found that this year-by-year attending classes 'to learn to read and write' was not really achieving very much.

A CHANCE TO LEARN?

Let us look at the problems more closely. The disadvantages to our students are enormous. We felt we were developing false hopes and expectations that perhaps one more term's work could make all the difference when, in fact, our student had achieved his full potential and that he, and his family, were unwittingly being conned into believing that further improvement could be made. After a while our students had reached a stalemate in their learning with a lack of stimulus and challenge. Then coming along to sessions had become solely a social night out and not a chance to learn. Some of these students also became disruptive, disturbing other members of the group.

Our centre relies heavily on voluntary tutors. Working with a long-term student can be very frustrating, leading to a feeling of being undervalued and with a lack of job satisfaction. There are also far reaching problems for the centre as a whole. A predominance of people with mental handicaps can deter other members of the community from coming along. The group might be seen as catering solely for the mentally handicapped, becoming a 'closed-shop' and resulting in a lack of growth for our students, the group and the Centre as a whole.

MAKING CHANGES

So how do we attempt to solve the problem? This is not easy. I spent quite some time discussing with each student and their tutor what they really wanted to achieve and whether it was really realistic. Together we negotiated their learning and set attainable goals. At the end I was left with five students for whom I felt that continuing to come along was not achieving these goals. So what could I offer? Two of the students continued with further education through their employers and the other three decided to take a break altogether for a while.

During the two years of the project we have established a policy of offering short courses covering various aspects of literacy, numeracy and communication skills work. So it was by offering a short course of 'Looking at Letter Writing' that I effectively closed down the traditional evening group. Two of our existing group decided to join the sessions and everyone else took a well earned rest! This gave time for our long-stay students to explore other interests and develop skills along different lines. The new course was advertised and introduced some new people to the Centre.

The outcome of this problem has been beneficial in so many ways. Making the break for our students was very hard but many have now found new interests. Some are extending their knowledge in other areas of further education and others are using the time to pursue other hobbies. The evening group now has new students and some new tutors, many of whom are using the new 'Wordpower' pack and are considering working towards the certificate in months to come. I hope that we have achieved more of a balance within the centre, becoming more accessible to all members of the community. I still keep in contact with the students who left us and they know that if they need further help we are available to offer it, but not on a long-term, year after year basis. I have also learnt the value of negotiated learning, with the setting of goals and frequent self-assessment.

I have to say that I would have been very unwilling to take these radical steps without the support of my colleagues, so my thanks go to Trish and Yvonne for their encouragement. So if you have a problem with a long-term student, take heart, it can be sorted out to everyone's satisfaction and the best of luck!'

INITIAL ASSESSMENT IN EMPLOYMENT TRAINING

Photo: Courtesy of Printing Dept., Crypt Assoc.

Working at the Crypt Association.

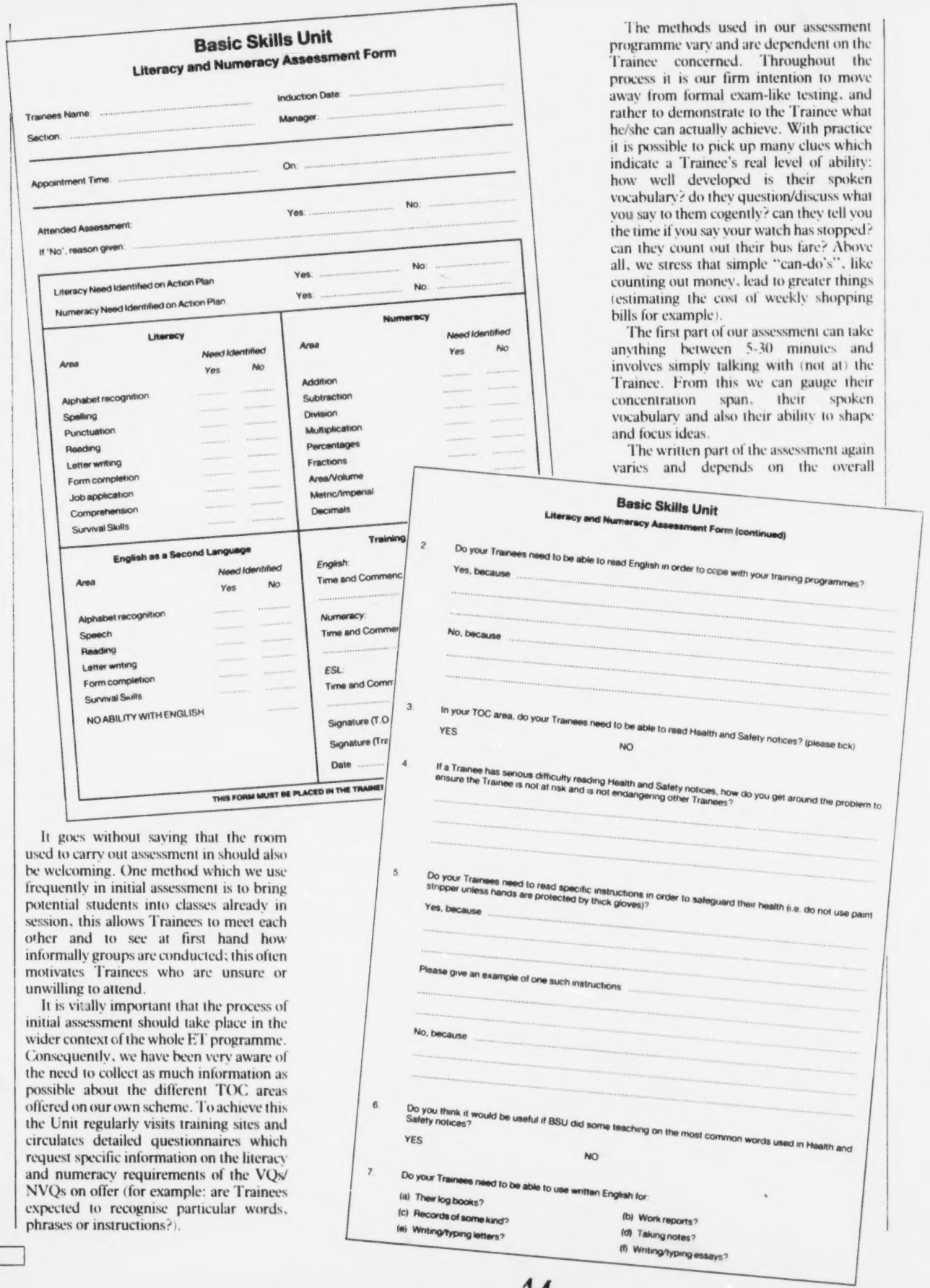
Initial Assessment of basic skills is of key importance in Employment Training. In this article Graham Taylor, Co-ordinator of the Basic Skills Unit at the Crypt Association Ltd, Wolverhampton, outlines the common-sense thinking which lies behind the programme they have developed. The Crypt Association Ltd is the largest ET Training Manager in the Wolverhampton area; it offers a range of TOC areas, and has an in-house Basic Skills Unit.

The problem facing many ABE practitioners working in ET is that the majority of Trainees, as well as being long term unemployed, are educationally disadvantaged and lack the fundamental English and Maths skills required in their chosen TOC areas. How then, does one go about assessing the numeracy and literacy skills of these people as a first step towards preparing and delivering a training programme which attempts to meet nationally recognised standards?

The initial assessment programme used at the Crypt is the result of methods which have been tried and tested on both Community Programme and ET. The programme has seven main objectives:

1. To investigate fully comments on Personal Training Plans (i.e., "Needs literacy" or "Needs numeracy" – useful, but vague!)
2. To reassure potential students that they will not be entering a school or college environment and that they will be treated as adults with minds and opinions of their own.
3. To provide an opportunity for Trainees to participate *fully* in the assessment process, allowing them to state their expectations of the tuition they will receive.
4. To gauge the existing level *and* potential of Trainees' literacy and numeracy skills.
5. To discuss, decide and agree upon *realistic* immediate goals (for example: writing own name and address).
6. To provide Trainees with as much information as possible on the type and level of English and/or Maths skills required in their chosen TOC areas.
7. To initiate the Basic Skills Unit's contribution to a client's training programme by notifying his/her Training Officer of the outcome of the assessment, specifying the time/date when tuition will begin.

A welcoming atmosphere is absolutely essential if initial assessment is to have any meaningful outcome. Trainees must feel at ease and able to talk about their reading, writing and numeracy problems. Consequently, a great deal of time is taken up in trying to elicit personal information from clients (number of children, memories of school, hobbies and interests, etc.) and in *exchanging* personal information ("Yes, I hated fractions as well!") – any topic which encourages conversation is useful.



Basic Skills Unit

Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Form

Trainees Name: ..... Induction Date: .....

Section: ..... Manager: .....

Appointment Time: ..... On: .....

Attended Assessment: Yes: ..... No: .....

If 'No', reason given: .....

Literacy Need Identified on Action Plan Yes: ..... No: .....

Numeracy Need Identified on Action Plan Yes: ..... No: .....

Literacy

Area	Need Identified Yes	No
Alphabet recognition	.....	.....
Spelling	.....	.....
Punctuation	.....	.....
Reading	.....	.....
Letter writing	.....	.....
Form completion	.....	.....
Job application	.....	.....
Comprehension	.....	.....
Survival Skills	.....	.....

Numeracy

Area	Need Identified Yes	No
Addition	.....	.....
Subtraction	.....	.....
Division	.....	.....
Multiplication	.....	.....
Percentages	.....	.....
Fractions	.....	.....
Area/Volume		
Metric/Imperial		
Decimals		

English as a Second Language

Area	Need Identified Yes	No
Alphabet recognition	.....	.....
Speech	.....	.....
Reading	.....	.....
Letter writing	.....	.....
Form completion	.....	.....
Survival Skills	.....	.....
NO ABILITY WITH ENGLISH		.....

Training

English:
Time and Commenc

Numeracy:
Time and Commer

ESL:
Time and Comm

Signature (T.O

Signature (Tra

Date .....

THIS FORM MUST BE PLACED IN THE TRAINEE

Basic Skills Unit

Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Form (continued)

2. Do your Trainees need to be able to read English in order to cope with your training programmes?

Yes, because .....

.....

.....

No, because .....

.....

.....

3. In your TOC area, do your Trainees need to be able to read Health and Safety notices? (please tick)

YES

NO

4. If a Trainee has serious difficulty reading Health and Safety notices, how do you get around the problem to ensure the Trainee is not at risk and is not endangering other Trainees?

.....

.....

.....

5. Do your Trainees need to read specific instructions in order to safeguard their health (i.e. do not use paint stripper unless hands are protected by thick gloves)?

Yes, because .....

.....

.....

Please give an example of one such instructions .....

.....

.....

No, because .....

.....

.....

6. Do you think it would be useful if BSU did some teaching on the most common words used in Health and Safety notices?

YES

NO

7. Do your Trainees need to be able to use written English for:

(a) Their log books?

(b) Work reports?

(c) Records of some kind?

(d) Taking notes?

(e) Writing/typing letters?

(f) Writing/typing essays?

The methods used in our assessment programme vary and are dependent on the Trainee concerned. Throughout the process it is our firm intention to move away from formal exam-like testing, and rather to demonstrate to the Trainee what he/she can actually achieve. With practice it is possible to pick up many clues which indicate a Trainee's real level of ability: how well developed is their spoken vocabulary? do they question/discuss what you say to them cogently? can they tell you the time if you say your watch has stopped? can they count out their bus fare? Above all, we stress that simple "can-do's", like counting out money, lead to greater things (estimating the cost of weekly shopping bills for example).

The first part of our assessment can take anything between 5-30 minutes and involves simply talking with (not at) the Trainee. From this we can gauge their concentration span, their spoken vocabulary and also their ability to shape and focus ideas.

The written part of the assessment again varies and depends on the overall

It goes without saying that the room used to carry out assessment in should also be welcoming. One method which we use frequently in initial assessment is to bring potential students into classes already in session, this allows Trainees to meet each other and to see at first hand how informally groups are conducted; this often motivates Trainees who are unsure or unwilling to attend.

It is vitally important that the process of initial assessment should take place in the wider context of the whole ET programme. Consequently, we have been very aware of the need to collect as much information as possible about the different TOC areas offered on our own scheme. To achieve this the Unit regularly visits training sites and circulates detailed questionnaires which request specific information on the literacy and numeracy requirements of the VQs/NVQs on offer (for example: are Trainees expected to recognise particular words, phrases or instructions?).

impression we have received of the Trainee's level of ability. For Trainees with apparently minimal skills we may ask them to write their own name and address and as much of the alphabet as they know/remember (correct sequencing is not a priority at this level). If this is achieved without difficulty, we proceed by selecting roughly 12 letters from the alphabet and ask the Trainee to write out any words, which they are reasonably confident of spelling correctly, beginning with those letters. This enables us to gauge the level of written vocabulary, spelling ability, awareness of upper/lower case letters and speed of written work.

For those Trainees who appear to have more highly developed skills, the assessment begins with the selection of letters, as outlined above. The second stage involves identification and explanation of basic punctuation. To conclude the written part of the assessment, we asked Trainees to write approximately 10 lines of A4 on a topic of their choice (fishing, Maggie Thatcher and Batman are recent examples). This allows us to gauge knowledge of sentence construction, use of grammar, spelling, sophistication of handwriting and written vocabulary.

Whatever a Trainee's apparent level of competence, the assessment includes an appraisal of reading ability. We use graded readers, newspapers, technical manuals, office memos – in fact anything which is most suitable for the Trainee concerned. The reading assessment aims to test speed, fluency and strategies for dealing with unfamiliar words.

As with the literacy assessment, the content and method of the numeracy assessment varies according to the Trainee concerned. Following the lead-in discussion, Trainees are asked to attempt a series of questions which test proficiency with numerical operations. Trainees with low skills levels can stop the assessment at the stage where borrowing, carrying, simple multiplication and division begin; those who are more able can proceed to the more taxing questions. Help is available throughout the test, and it is surprising (and pleasing!) how many Trainees, who initially say "Can't do that", are able to recall methods taught to them some 5, 10, or even 35 years ago with a little prompting.

The second stage of the numeracy assessment is centred around the requirements of the TOC area which the Trainee will enter. Trainees are questioned verbally on a range of appropriate topics (knowledge of metric measurements, of VAT, temperature scales, area/volume, fractions, decimals and ratio and proportion are a few of the more obvious examples). Trainees who say they are reasonably confident with a topic are asked to answer a series of written questions to confirm this (we glean questions from a range of sources, but most often rely on the simple expedient of making them up on the spot).

It is essential to feedback to Trainees both during and after the assessment. Commenting on a Trainee's strengths and weaknesses and suggesting areas which need improvement in light of the TOC area they will enter are both extremely important. But quite often it is necessary to motivate and encourage the faint-hearted. We have found that the best way to achieve this is not to focus on the demands of ET, but rather to point out that, with a little help, it might be possible to write short letters to friends or read the TV pages in local newspapers – social needs are just as important as work-related ones.

As with most aspects of ET, our initial assessment programme generates a certain amount of paperwork. We retain and file all the written work produced by Trainees, and refer back to it during the course of tuition in order to decide further goals. We also produce a summary of the assessment which not only acts as an aide-memoire, but also records the time and date tuition will commence; the summary is placed in the Trainee's NROVA and thus serves as a permanent record of the fact that a literacy/numeracy need was identified and subsequently acted on.

Aisling O'Reilly

A TRIBUTE FROM GAY LOBLEY

Director, Language and Literacy Unit, ILEA

Very many students and tutors in London were shocked and saddened to learn of Aisling O'Reilly's death on 29th November 1989, following a liver transplant operation a few weeks earlier. Aisling was only 35 when she died and it is all the more poignant that her death came at a time of great personal happiness to Aisling and her husband, Colin Barnett, with the birth of their first child, Hannah, in August 1989.

Aisling, who graduated in English at Trinity College, Dublin, spent a few years working at the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, before joining the staff of Camden Institute in London in the early 1980's. Like many literacy workers, Aisling began her career as a volunteer, but before long she was teaching on a wide range of Literacy courses and had developed a particular interest in students with Specific Learning Difficulties.

Through her work on this ALBSU Local Development Project, and as a trainer on a number of cross-London courses for the Language and Literacy Unit, Aisling established a considerable reputation as a literacy worker. As a teacher, an organiser, and a trainer, she had the ability to communicate her deep love of language, her obvious commitment to development of literacy and, above all, her very real respect for students. This respect manifested itself in the way she was able, with great sensitivity, to convey to students her belief that they *could* and *should* be honest about their progress and take charge of their learning. As one of her students said to me recently, "She wouldn't let you get away with anything . . . you had to decide whether it was good or bad . . . you had to take responsibility because she respected us". But as well as her talents as a teacher, and her commitment to her work, most of us can't forget how much fun she was to be with and the way she threw herself into the social as well as the professional side of her work. A close colleague remembers, for example, Aisling singing her heart out as a member of the Camden Institute Fresh Start Choir and the fun they had on the Writing Weekend in Brighton.

Personally and professionally, she is a great loss to all of us in literacy who had the pleasure of working with her. We can only echo the sentiments of another close colleague who knew Aisling as a young, exuberant and talented Irish woman when he said that the extinguishing of a buoyant and rising star is a particularly sad loss to the London Irish community.

It is typical of Aisling that in death, as in her life, she makes us think of others. At her family's request, those who wish to mark her memory have been requested to make a donation to the Kings College Liver Research Unit.

Donations should be sent to:
Dr Roger Williams, MD, FRCP,
Liver Unit, Kings College Hospital,
Denmark Hill, London SE5 8RX
(cheques payable to 'The Liver Research Unit Trust').

Someone to turn to: The Social Worker's Role and the role of front line staff in relation to people with mental handicaps

by Dorothy Atkinson

Price: £6.95

ISBN 0 906054 66 4

The Andover Project

by David Felce

Price: £5.95

ISBN 0 906054 70 2

Published by British Institute of Mental Handicap (BIMH) Publications, Foley Industrial Park, Stourport Road, Kidderminster, Worcester DY11 7QG.

In this LEA we are just beginning an action research project for the Further Education Unit which seeks to look at the 'transition curriculum' for people leaving long stay mental handicap hospitals. It will require the two Project Workers to find out what kind of educational support is required by people who are about to leave or who have left a hospital. From the recent Health White Paper, *Caring for People* (HMSO, 1989) we now know that social services departments will be the lead agency for community care, that 'packages of care' will be required for individuals and that local authorities will have to produce community care plans next year, in collaboration with health. Our modest research project has grown in importance in our minds. At this time of great change we need publications for LEA planners and practitioners. The British Institute for Mental Handicap is famous for running conferences on important issues which we support – on profound handicap for instance (it is also famous for long input-driven conferences which stimulate the mind but tire the backside). These two publications from BIMH seem obvious choices to give to our two Project Workers. I began reading them with some relish.

David Felce is the Director of BIMH, all the references in the bibliography mention his name and the narrative style of *The Andover Project* is hard going. Nevertheless, this DHSS funded research project is an interesting insight into how some health-district staffed homes were set up to accommodate small groups of people with severe learning difficulty who had other disabilities too. There are no comments from those researched, some frequent references to 'mental age' and a set of models which defy understanding. Dr Felce comments that the quality of support from the staff is directly related to the initial staff development and his final chapter on implications for service authorities is of some value. This is an expensive booklet. A far better report of research within the severe learning difficulty sector is offered by Dorothy Atkinson. *Someone to Turn To* is an excellent publication. It is easier to read, draws more widely on literature and speaks of clients with some respect. But those familiar with Dorothy Atkinson's work in the Open University would expect that. Her book is essentially a study of what "front line staff" do in relation to people with severe learning difficulties living in the community. In her final chapter she too sees staff development as of key importance, discovering that special knowledge of mental handicap and special training were not identified as burning issues. Instead, she concludes,

> *Staff needed opportunities to develop self-awareness, to study human behaviour more widely, and to acquire a set of interpersonal helping skills.*

Neither publication has an index or mentions education services for adults. In spite of this I shall happily pass a copy of *Someone to Turn To* to our two Project Workers and I know it will be appreciated. They will not miss the other BIMH Publication.

Peter Lavender,
Assistant Education Officer
(Special Needs – Post 16)
Norfolk LEA

Tutoring Adults in Basic Education

by Scottish Community Education Council

Published by Scottish Community Education Council, West Coates House, 90 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh EH12 5LQ.

Price: £25.00 incl. pp.

ISBN 0 947919 31 7

This pack of five units is a very valuable source of help, information and ideas for tutors in ABE, both volunteer and paid, and for tutor trainers. The units cover an introduction to adult learning, planning individual learning programmes from initial assessment to ongoing evaluation, help with reading and writing, and working with groups in ABE. They are essentially training materials either for use by tutors or on a self-study basis. The pack is also useful for tutors in vocational training whose students include those with literacy difficulties. It isn't a "read all about it" pack but, on the contrary, poses questions and involves the basic education tutor in a series of tasks. The authors themselves put into practice the methods of active learning that the tutors are being encouraged to adopt. Feedback on the tasks is provided as a useful reference materials and examples of "good practice".

The pack is written in clear, accessible language, generally well-presented and laid-out. Though perhaps clearer divisions, both within and between sections, could have been made in places. Many practical hints and tips are provided, probably most useful for new volunteer tutors, but also for more experienced practitioners. The unit on Groupwork may be of particular interest to paid tutors. A useful list of further reading and resources is included at the end of each unit.

SCEC have also published a "Numeracy Pack", which together make up a full training course for those wishing to follow an open mode of learning.

Gordon Crawford
Part-time ABE Tutor Open Learning
Leeds Education Authority

Your Way Into Learning

by Miriam Sampson, Jan Riley, Lesley Knott, Margaret Dawson

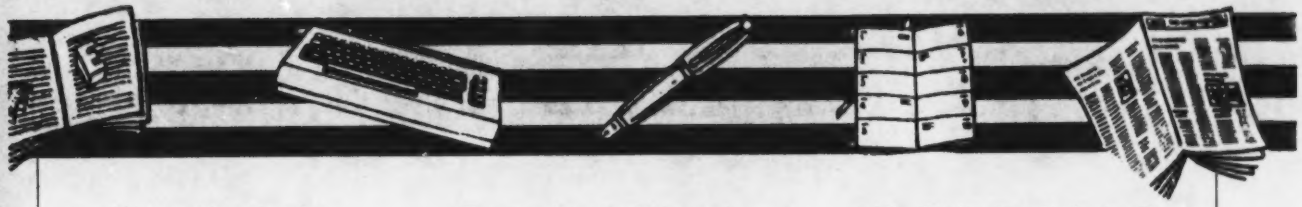
Published by The Multi Media Scheme, Portsmouth College of Art, Design & F.E.

Available from Adult Basic Education, New Road Centre, New Road, Portsmouth PO2 7QL

Price: £2.50 incl p+p

It is good to see an open learning pack on learning how to learn. This spiral bound pack, which includes many self-directed activities, is divided into five sections. These deal with: exploring feelings about learning, thinking about how adults learn, analysing your own strengths and weaknesses in study skills, getting organised for learning and how to get help.

The pack is addressed to any adult learner who is returning to study (it tends to assume that those reading it



would be working towards a qualification) so that many ABE students would need considerable support in using these materials. However, it is full of useful pointers and advice which all students should be acquainted with; the first two sections especially could be used by ABE tutors as a resource for activities and discussion.

Most of the pack is clearly written and well laid out through some pages are rather densely packed and there is some tendency to repetition, especially in the later sections. It's a shame that it was not proof-read more efficiently, that there is some stereotyping in the illustrations, that the fifth section has an altogether local bias and that there is no back cover, though these shortcomings do not detract in any major way from the overall value of these materials.

I would certainly recommend 'Your Way Into Learning' to ABE students and tutors as a useful resource, especially since it appears to be copyright-free.

Linda Lever
ABE Resources Organiser
Liverpool LEA

Now Then

by Writers from the Commonword Writing Workshops

Price: £3.50

ISBN 0 946745 55 2

Talkers Through Dream Doors

by Asian and Afro-Caribbean women writers

Price: £3.50

ISBN 0 946745 60 9

No Earthly Reason?

by various writers

Price: £3.50

ISBN 0 946745 65 X

All three books are published by Crocus Books, Commonword Ltd.

Available from Cheetwood House, 21 Newton Street, Manchester M1 1FZ, add 75p for postage and packing if ordering directly from Commonword Ltd.

These three books, the latest publications from Commonword Ltd., a non-profit making community publishing co-operative based in Manchester, are anthologies by writers living in the North West. *Now Then*, a collection of short stories and poetry, recalls some aspects of life, work and leisure from 1945 to the present day.

Talkers Through Dream Doors, also a collection of short stories and poetry, is written by Black women and concentrates mainly on womens' issues.

No Earthly Reason? is an anthology of poetry concerned with 'Green' issues.

In all three volumes the contributions have been selected from submissions from different writing groups and individual writers and for each the selections made by specially chosen editorial groups.

Many of the contributions in *Now Then* evoke very specific memories of life in the North West: Whitsun Wakes Walks, thriving mills, the brave new world of 1960's council house 'plantations' etc.

The contributions are reasonably well crafted but they tend to disappoint in their lack of depth. I feel that if a number of the chosen themes had been developed further they would hold more excitement and interest to the reader.

This anthology may be of interest to ABE groups as reading materials or as a starting point to students writing about personal experiences.

It is no easy task to review *Writers Through Dream Doors* from the perspective of the predominantly "white" county of Dorset. The foreword claims that the contributions reflect the pain experienced by Black women growing up in a white, male dominated society. There is no doubt that what makes this book come alive is that pain, and the anger and frustration expressed in many of the contributions. Irony is expressed in poems like "The Right Mix":

> . . . we must promote the cause
> The ethnic minorities – I mean the Blacks.
> That's why we must have 1.5 West Indians,
> 1.4 Asians to 3 white workers –
> To get the mix right,
> And fight for the Cause!
> After all Britain is a multi-racial society
> And we are here to see justice done!

and pathos abounds in poems like "Upon the Nature of Man" and "When did You Cry Last?" and in the two short stories.

This is a collection I would recommend to any ABE group and for a variety of reasons: the contributions are well written, they are full of interest, they contribute to an awareness of growing up Black in Britain but perhaps, most of all, they will have an enormous appeal to Women, Black or White, in many of the issues they addressed.

I have to admit that I enjoyed most *No Earthly Reason?* It ranges from major Green global issues such as deforestation to the poisoning of our food by scientific 'advances', to climatic changes resulting from the chaotic consumerism of today's society. Yet somehow this book manages to address the themes with humour, wryness and directness. Most impressive is the economy of style of the authors which adds so much to the issues on which they write and which makes this volume one I would wish to read again and again. I recommend it unhesitatingly to any ABE group or individuals.

Eileen Stow
County Co-ordinator and Training Officer, Dorset LEA

A Working Life

by Halima

Available from: c/o Start Works, Darnall Road, Sheffield S9 5AF

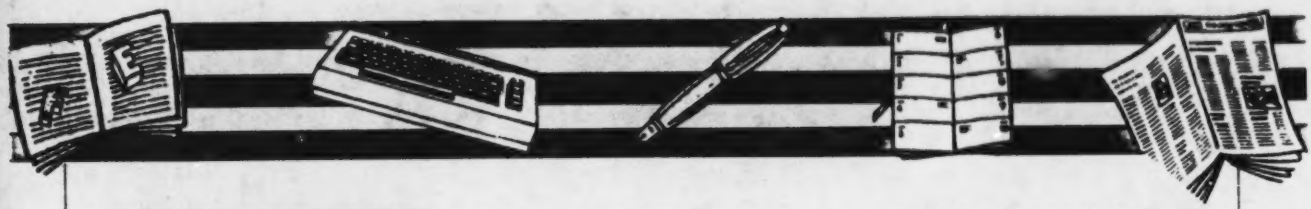
Price: 60p

A Working Life is a potted history of Halima's life. Living in Somalia with family, moving to England – aspirations and problems.

The print was bold and very easy to read, and the lino cuttings added a definite cultural flavour to the book and increased the readers want to go on.

The preface states that the book was left with a worker when Halima moved on. Halimas' ambition was to have her work published; well I hope Halima has seen this wonderful piece of work. A word for tutors – what greater accolade for any student than to produce a piece of their own work in a similar way.

Dawn Hodgson
ABE Support Tutor
Durham LEA



50 Years of Memories – 1910-1960

by Horton Life History Group

Price: 60p + 24p

My Roots

by Ernestina Walters

Price: £1.00 + 34p

Published by Gatehouse Calderwell Students Committee, Peckett Well College, 36 Gibbet Street, Halifax HX1 5BA

50 Years of Memories is an informal collection of the memories of five members of the Horton House Life History Group in Halifax. It includes memories of family, friends, places and events. The authors are writing principally for themselves, to remember, to reflect on and to savour personal important memories.

The format is just a series of photocopied sheets, illustrated mainly with drawings. The print, spacing and layout vary throughout the booklet, but on the whole do not help the reader much . . . which is a pity.

In *My Roots* – under her full name Ernestina Walters – one of the same Life History Group no longer writes for herself but "for my children, grandchildren and for generations to come". This is Ernestina's story of her childhood in an Italian village, her convent schooling and her eventual move to Halifax as a dressmaker.

The booklet is full of moving memories of growing up in a poor family where schooling for the youngest sister was not a priority for the meagre funds. Ernestina had to wait until she had turned fifty to fulfil her dream to get education enough to become a writer.

The book is written in an English which has a distinct Italian 'flavour' to it, but we think that this just adds to its authenticity and interest. The layout is clear, and although only a small booklet, it has sophistication and 'style'. It is a beautiful little book.

Both booklets are probably of limited interest to others, but taken together they are undoubtedly an inspiration to adult basic education centres on what is possible when peoples' lives and language are respected and valued.

A Group of Voluntary Tutors
Northumberland LEA

Here's Handwriting

by Lesley Henderson (various contributors)

Published by Scottish Community Education Council, West Coates House, 90 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh EH12 5LQ

Price: £7.50

ISBN 0 947919 36 8

This spiral-bound pack is for people who can write, but who wish to improve or change their handwriting; it is not for beginner writers. It is addressed directly to the student and could be used by many writers, apart from those in ABE.

The first part deals with memories and feelings about writing, purposes for writing and making the conditions right before you start. Following this are sections on analysing your own writing, considering what makes good writing, choosing a good model to copy, left handedness and follow-up ideas.

The pack is clearly written and very well presented. It has a friendly, interactive style. Much of it could be used to generate discussion and further activities. It does, however, take a long time to get through the preliminary thinking about writing and on to the practicalities of what to do if you are dissatisfied with your handwriting, some students might become frustrated by this 'wordiness'.

The analysis of handwriting and self assessment is very useful. Some of the examples might have been improved, but it was refreshing to find a Scottish flavour creeping in here and there.

Altogether this is a worthwhile publication which will probably be of particular usefulness in Open Learning Centres.

Linda Lever
ABE Resources Organiser
Liverpool LEA

Wesley My Only Son

by Monica Jules

Published by Centerprise, 136 Kingsland High Street, London E8

Price: £1.95

ISBN 0 903738 73 2

This is an absorbing account by the mother of an autistic child about the difficulties of bringing up a child with disabilities on her own. We follow the story of mother and son from the start of the pregnancy until shortly after his fifth birthday.

Everyone who has looked at this book has been very interested in Wesley's life, and has liked the style of the author whose caring personality is reflected. It is a good read at 62 pages in a large, clear print and well illustrated with photographs. There are 22 chapters so that slower readers can attempt manageable chunks of text, but it will appeal more to better readers who can lose themselves in it as our students did.

Helen Allgrove
Organisation Tutor, ABE
Havering Education Authority

The ALBSU Newsletter is published four times a year, in November, February, May and July. Copies are available, free, to organisations and individuals. We aim to publish articles of interest to those teaching in adult literacy, second language and basic skills, those who are responsible for funding and organising the provision, and those who are generally interested in these important areas of work.

If you have ideas on topics which you would like to see covered, please contact the Editor, at ALBSU. Reviews of relevant publications are written for the newsletter by practitioners, and we are interested to receive publications which could be useful in basic education.

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NEWSLETTER

Photo by Tony Othen

HRH The Princess Royal with Lesley Wilkinson, Helen Griffiths, Ann Wales and Linda Evans (members of Clwyd's Adult Basic Education team) at the opening of the Open Learning Centre at Rhyl Library on February 12.

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'STANLEY AND IRIS'

– Hollywood Discovers Literacy

You may think that you have the wrong newsletter when you see that this article is about a forthcoming Hollywood film. 'Stanley and Iris', however, presents a real problem for everyone interested in promoting an accurate image of what basic education is all about.

Promoting the right image for basic education is particularly important if we want to attract new students as well as change public attitudes. Hopefully, in the process, we will also gain increased support for better funding and a higher priority. Much has already been achieved in the last few years by careful awareness raising locally, by targeted publicity and by the use of up-to-date publicity techniques and attractive leaflets and posters. The promoting of a now well known symbol for adult literacy (although inappropriate use has some negative effects) and the long term support of broadcasting, particularly the BBC, has meant that there is less ignorance about basic education amongst politicians and the general public and fewer really embarrassing 'howlers' appear in the press.

Hopefully something has also been achieved in presenting the right image of basic education students. Of course basic education students are a varied group of individuals who often have little in common except the desire to improve competence in essential basic skills. Presenting any image runs the danger of giving the impression that basic education students are a homogeneous group rather than a number of distinct individuals. Good and constant publicity has overcome, in the main, the image of basic education students as inadequate people – as 'problem people' rather than as people who want to overcome some difficulties with essential skills. A representative basic education student is no more the person who wants only to write a birthday card than it is the person who wants to get a degree.

ROBERT DE NIRO – THE HOLLYWOOD LITERACY STUDENT

"Stanley and Iris", a new film from Hollywood, will, however, 'turn the clock back' when it is released in the UK in June. It presents, albeit sometimes attractively, many of the trite simplifications about basic education that we have spent so long trying to get away from. "Stanley and Iris" stars Jane Fonda and Robert De Niro as two factory workers in the United States who meet and eventually fall in love. The twist is that De Niro cannot read or write. They first meet when Iris (Fonda), a widow struggling to keep her head above water, has her purse snatched and Stanley (De Niro) comes to her aid. Both work in a bakery, Stanley in the canteen and Iris on the cake production line. Evenutally Iris spots that Stanley cannot read (seemingly at all) when she asks him for some aspirin or similar pills in the canteen and in a familiar piece of stereotyping he gives her an endless number of wrong bottles.

THE PLOT THICKENS!

Although he is initially reluctant, Iris convinces Stanley to try to learn to read and offers to teach him. She gets some books (although no training it seems) and sets about teaching him in her house (where conveniently there appears to be a blackboard in the kitchen). She uses a method well known in the United States called Laubach Literacy and the books are prominiently featured during their teaching sessions. This approach emphasises the sounding out of individual letters, largely in a meaningless context, rather than using an approach which is based on interest and context. Thus, all of the opportunities to link learning to work (although by this point he has been sacked because his firm found out that he couldn't read or write) or to link it to his interests (he seems to know the Latin names of all of the trees in the local park) are missed as he slavishly tries to learn what "Diane did with the duck" or something similar. At one point, apparently in an attempt to appease the equal opportunities lobby, she stops doing the ironing while teaching him and he takes over ironing while she writes on the blackboard.

All of this is bad enough but the other messages of the film are even more worrying. Stanley has an elderly father who, because he loses his job, has to go into an old peoples' home of the worst kind. The old man soon gives up any interest in life and dies and in one particularly awful scene Stanley tells Iris' son how, if he had been able to read, his father wouldn't have died. Eventually, almost it seems by magic, Stanley suddenly discovers that he has learnt to read and runs through a library picking books up at random (including the bible) and reads them out to the unashamed joy of Iris.

Although reviewers shouldn't, perhaps, give away the endings of films, suffice to say that Stanley, although he cannot read at all and is living in a garage, has invented a wonderful machine which will save bakeries lots of money. He gets a job in

another city (at the Airport he promises Iris that he will phone her but, to remind you that this is a film about literacy, she tells him to write), makes a lot of money and returns in a big new car to whisk Iris and fatherless children off to a new life. The "American Dream" comes true because he learnt to read and write.

"STANLEY AND IRIS" AND REALITY

Unfortunately although it has taken twenty years for Hollywood to discover the 'literacy problem', 'Stanley and Iris' will probably do untold damage to all of the image building that has taken place both nationally and locally in the last few years. It presents an image of literacy students that is far from reality. The idea that anyone without training can suddenly successfully teach without support is an attractive concept but years of experience has proved that it is almost entirely untrue. The use of slavish, childish primers, long discarded in most countries, presents all of the wrong images about the teaching/learning process in basic education (most primary schools would not use similar methods) and the idea that there is a magic key to learning to read is an educational nonsense.

You may wonder why ALBSU were able to see this film before it is released in the UK. We were able to see a preview copy because it was suggested that we might want to promote 'Stanley and Iris' in some way in International Literacy Year. Clearly a high profile Hollywood film with well known actors which dealt with literacy would be a golden opportunity. Free showings for basic education schemes, endorsements from the actors and Director and even, perhaps, a telephone referral number shown in every cinema would certainly be worthwhile during ILY.

You will understand, from what appears above, why we decided not to get involved and why 'Stanley and Iris' is not only a missed opportunity to treat an important subject seriously, but why it is likely to do more damage than good. (It seems that many people without any prior knowledge of literacy in the States think that it is a very accurate portrayal). It will inevitably encourage some people to want to be taught in the same way as Stanley is in the film and to expect the same rapid progress; it may encourage funders to demand the same rate of success for all students (total non-reader to corporate board room in less than two years!); it will sustain the belief that literacy teaching is for well intentioned amateurs, that you don't need any training or support to be successful and that learning to read is about mastery of a number of discrete skills unlinked to any particular context. It will give credence to the mistaken idea that literacy students are the accidental victims of fate rather than people who have had a poor deal from the education system.

BLAMING THE VICTIM

'Stanley and Iris' is not deliberately trite and insensitive. In fact, the portrayal of working class America is, in parts, surprisingly good. However, the search for simplistic and somewhat sensational illustrations of 'the literacy problem' destroys any connection with reality. The United States seems to particularly suffer from this approach. A year or two ago American 'prime time' television featured a similar attempt to illustrate 'the literacy problem' by 'blaming the victim' and sensationalising the effect of limited literacy skills in the United States. This programme starred Dennis Weaver (older readers will remember him as Chester in 'Gunsmoke' with the Marshall and Miss Kitty, whilst other readers will know him as Marshall McCloud) as a non-reader truck driver.

The programme begins with him setting off on a journey with a map, drawn for him by his wife, displayed prominently in front of him in the cab. He drives along happily and passes a small car of waving children with their mother on the highway. Distracted by this he starts to take the wrong fork in the road, spots on the map that it seems to be the wrong way and swerves over onto the car. He jumps out of the cab in shock, runs up the road to a telephone booth and phones the emergency services. The resulting conversation (accompanied by the sound of distressed screaming in the background) goes something like this:

Telephone operator: "Emergency services".

Truck driver; "There's been a terrible accident, you've got to send help".

Telephone operator: "Where are you"?

Truck driver: "I don't know"

Telephone operator: "It's written in the telephone booth in front of you".

Truck driver: (in sobbing voice) "I can't read".

followed by the sound of an exploding car in the background.

It is, of course, important that the media draws attention to basic skills needs. Unfortunately it is all too easy an area to sensationalise when in reality adults who want to improve their basic skills are fairly ordinary. Certainly it is unduly simplistic to think that lack of basic skills amongst a minority of people is the reason for most accidents (poor driving is more likely) or one of the causes of a country's poor economic performance. Perhaps we have been fortunate in the UK that programmes about literacy made by the BBC and Independent Television have been a good deal more sensitive and less insulting to the intelligence of the viewer.

PRESENTING THE RIGHT IMAGE

We all run the danger of stereotyping literacy students (and the same could be said for ESOL students) in trying to publicise the need for high quality provision for adults. Clearly, it's not possible to present every student or potential student in a poster or to describe every different need or learning experience in a leaflet. Nor are most funders and policy makers interested in the details of teaching approaches or the intricacies of assessment.

We do know, however, that students have different goals, make progress at different rates, like to learn in different ways, and learn best if they are interested in what they are learning and can see that it is worthwhile. They want to be seen as partners in learning, able to take an active part in determining the 'learning plan' and assessing progress and be treated as an adult learner rather than as a failed child.

If we continue to present this image as the reality, hopefully, Stanley and Iris will be little more than a not very convincing, soon forgotten, Hollywood film.

NUMERACY IN THE BASIC SKILLS ACCREDITATION INITIATIVE

Leslie Morphy, Director of the Basic Skills Accreditation Initiative, outlines the development of the numeracy certificate and reports on some revealing research on adults' feelings about maths, and their images of who attends maths classes.

It is unusual for numeracy to take a front seat in basic skills provision. Numeracy tutors and trainers frequently suggest they are poor relations when it comes to training opportunities and resource allocation. The Basic Skills Accreditation Initiative's (BSAI) main concentration this year is on numeracy. With the involvement of the Training Agency, ALBSU and the BBC this is likely to heighten its profile over the coming months. This in turn has implications for learners' expectations and for training needs.

Development work is underway at the moment both in the accreditation area and on the broadcasting front. Existing students and trainees will want the opportunity of graining credits which will be available through BSAI. Broadcasts can provide a focus for recruiting new students. At the same time the programmes have a more specific brief than a general recruitment drive which is to link in with accreditation opportunities. The possibility of being able to get a qualification is itself a motivator for part of the target audience.

BBC Research agreed to conduct some qualitiative research on behalf of the Initative. Their brief was to provide some in-depth understanding of why those who were experiencing difficulties with basic maths failed to come forward for help.

In the course of this research they explored a number of questions:

- What were people's early formative experience with number and teachers of maths?
- What is their current level of understanding and skill?
- What everyday situations caused problems?
- What were they interested in being able to do?
- What were their expectations about courses or classes?

Many of the findings are unsurprising to experienced numeracy practitioners and echo research done previously. But the results make interesting reading. The disaffection with maths expressed is particularly chilling.

People were asked to select photographs or words which expressed how they personally felt about maths at school. Negative words and photographs were balanced by positive or neutral ones. Overwhelmingly negative images and words were chosen. The research report states:

> *"The choices and subsequent discussion vividly chronicled various stages in a process which typically began with a failure of understanding and concluded in "switch off" and "boredom".*

The photograph reproduced here shows one which was chosen to typify people's feelings. Other photographs picked portrayed boredom, exhaustion, anger and isolation. One potent image chosen was a hand gun labelled as a "government exhibit". In explaining why this image had been chosen a young man in the South of England said:

> *"It feels as though you've got a gun against your head to try and do it. And no explaining. In the end you just panic in what you're doing all the time."*

And a woman in Edinburgh:

> *"I'd like to shoot some of the teachers. "Panic" that's how I permanently felt about that subject at school. Total panic."*

An initial failure to understand and to receive adequate explanation leads to loss of confidence, panic and finally "switch off" and boredom.

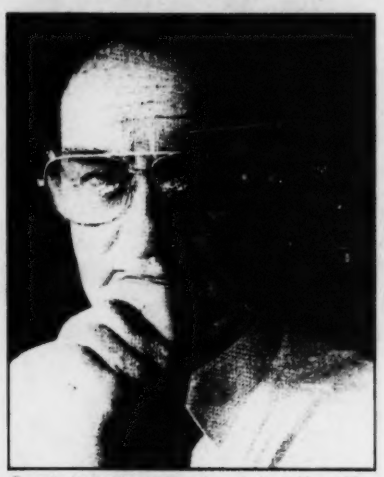
"I was just kind of stuck." A 39 year old woman in the West Midlands picked this picture to illustrate her early experience of maths.

A second series of photographs showed a wide range of people of different ages, sex and social types. People were asked to pick photographs of those whom they thought might go to a basic maths class. The research report states:

> *"Three out of four groups selected photographs showing people identified earlier in another research project as "yuppies" or successful upwardly-mobile characters. Their comments showed that they too saw the photographs in a similar way . . . a fifth group when asked the same question without being shown the photographs produced very similar answers."*

The broadcasts can play an important role in creating a general atmosphere that encourages learners to be receptive to local learning opportunities. They can also affect the perceptions of those already in education and training. The importance of building confidence and providing accessible explanation cannot be overstressed. The need to challenge strongly held beliefs that learning opportunities are not "for people like us" adds a further dimension.

"I chose the girl on the telephone because she looks a career type person anyway."



People in basic maths classes look like: *"The long one with the glasses – he looks like the intellectual type. He probably knows it and wants to learn a bit more."*

How good they can be at doing all or any of this depends on the relative success of matching the message to the target audience. And crucially on getting the message right! How to motivate an audience for whom any mention of maths is likely to result, quite literally in a turn off, presents television producers with a dilemma. This dilemma is all too familiar to those trying to recruit students locally. Presenting maths as fun or as easy is unlikely to cut much ice with our target audience. This audience is likely to have lost confidence in their ability to understand maths and is inclined to panic when presented with numerical concepts or computations.

The identification of learning outcomes which should appear in the accreditation framework has been pursued separately drawing on previous work done in this area. But within the limits of the research there is a congruence between the research findings, that is what people said they needed to be able to do, and proposed outcome statements for the accreditation framework.

Accreditation and certification for numeracy will follow the pattern set with communication skills. Communication skills certificates are already available through City and Guilds.

The accreditation framework is designed to provide a vehicle for recording and recognising people's ability to use communication skills and numeracy. The numeracy units are designed to specify standards of performance which describe the results of what someone does.

The units, which are made up of a series of elements and associated performance criteria, are a description of behaviour. They are not designed either as a teaching programme or as a learning curriculum. Rather the standards guide the learning/teaching programme. It is for the student and tutor, trainer or trainee to develop the learning programme which can identify the strengths and weaknesses which need to be worked on to produce a portfolio of work which demonstrates competence.

The context within which a learner chooses to demonstrate his or her competence is not laid down. This structure follows that developed by NCVQ and the Training Agency to accredit standards of performance in vocational areas.

Another imprtant characteristic of each element is a range statement. This is designed to show the limits of the application that the element is intended to accredit. It gives examples, which are not intended to be comprehensive, of the type of material or situation through which competence can be shown. It is largely the range statement which allows the units to be ordered into different levels of certification. It should aid those working with National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) to identify the degree of sophistication in using numeracy that is required for someone to be able to successfully achieve a particular NVQ.

Three levels of certification are being developed – Foundation, Stage 1 and Stage 2 certificates. Work on the individual units should be completed by May so that City and Guilds can prepare the necessary documentation and assessment procedures by November 1990. Seven units are being developed although not all will necessarily appear at all levels. The units are:

A. Count, measure and weigh

B. Manage time

C. Use money to buy or save

D. Obtain payment for goods and services

E. Use a budget

F. Set, control and adjust

G. Use graphical information

An example of an element

This element would be part of Unit 5 at Foundation level.

Element *Measure lengths and calculate dimensions and areas*

Performance Criteria

1. Appropriate tools and instruments are selected and used correctly
2. Units of measurement chosen are appropriate to context
3. Estimates of lengths are made to an accuracy appropriate to context
4. Lengths are measured to an accuracy appropriate to the context
5. Areas of rectangular shapes are calculated and answers presented with units appropriate to the context

Range

Linear measurements. Simple rectangular areas.

Types of tools: rules, tape measures

Type of units: whole units of millimetres, centimetres and metres; inches, feet and yards.

Assessment at this level is likely to require measurement in *either* metric or imperial.

The subject matter of 20 instructional programmes on BBC TV will be guided by the units. A core pack of materials will be produced to aid tutors and trainers in designing curricula. Such curricula will assist learners to develop and use those skills which enable them to demonstrate they can fulfil the demands of the units. One of the lessons learnt from the first phase of the Initiative is that tutors and trainers would welcome this kind of material. It would clearly enhance their ability to help learners.

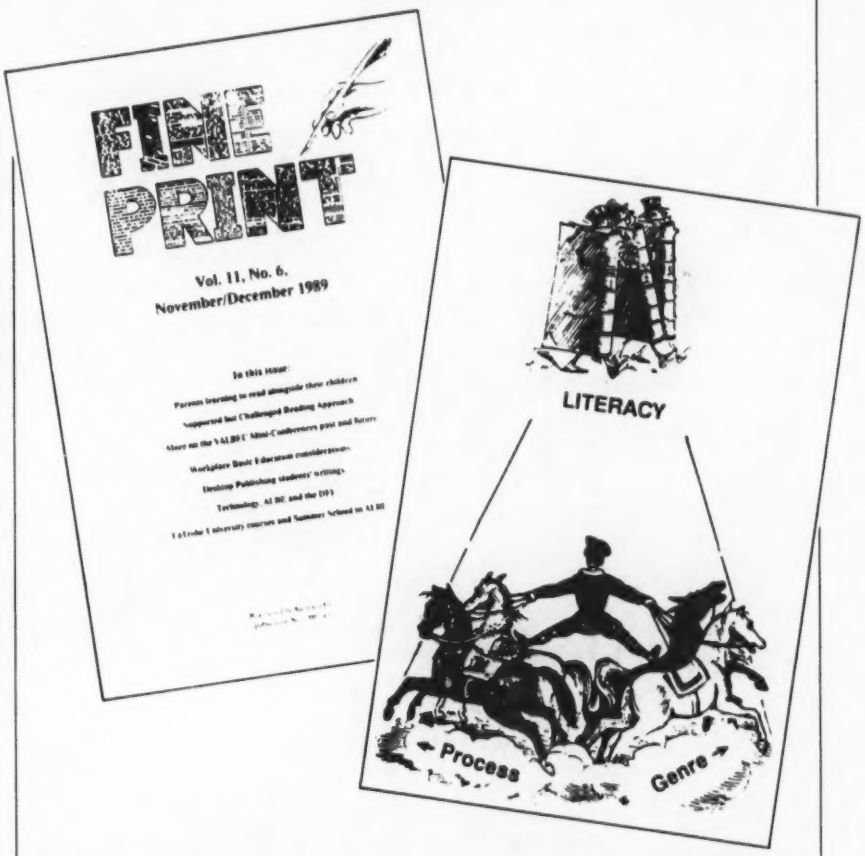
Components of the numeracy initiative

1. Accreditation and certification for learners
2. BBC TV programmes
   8 x 10 minute motivational programmes
   20 x 25 minute instructional programmes
3. Materials production
   i) leaflet for viewers
   ii) core pack of materials for tutors/trainers to support learners
   iii) BBC book for learners
   iv) audio package for trainers and tutors
4. Referral service 0800 freephone number
5. Learning opportunities including 70 Open Learning Centres
6. Training

GENRE AND PROCESS

In this article Rob McCormack, who works for Compensatory Education, Footscray College of TAFE, highlights a debate which is the subject of considerable discussion in literacy work in Australia. This centres on two theories derived from linguistics, genre and process, and on their implications for literacy.

'Genre and Process' was first published in Fine Print, the newsletter of the Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council Inc. (VALBEC Inc.), Melbourne, Australia, in December 1989. ALBSU is grateful for their permission to reprint this article.



Introduction – genre theory

Over the last couple of years, a new 'buzz word' has appeared on the literacy scene – 'genre theory'. In this article I try to briefly sketch in an introductory way some of the claims and directions of genre theory. An in-depth analysis and critical discussion will have to wait for a later occasion.

Genre theory is an offshoot of systemic-functional linguistics which is associated with Michael Halliday. Hallidayian linguistics has always had a special place in education. During the 1960's, Halliday worked closely with teachers in Britain; work that produced two significant curriculum passages: *Breakthrough to Literacy* and *Uses of English*. Unlike most linguists, Halliday has always held firm to two beliefs: one, that linguistics should always be *applied* linguistics: that is, it should always be developed with a practical problem in mind – and education is obviously one important site for the development and use of practical linguistic knowledge. The other belief he has refused to relinquish is that linguistics must not abstract itself from the study of meaning; that is, the description of languages and their grammars (syntax) must not be separated from the study of how these grammars convey meaning (semantics and pragmatics). Again, this means that whereas much linguistics, following Chomsky, has separated the study of syntax from the study of language as communicating meaning, and thus has become increasingly irrelevant to practising teachers, Halliday's study of the grammar and syntax of English, by focusing on how language is structured to make meaning, is vitally relevant to language teachers.

Contexts, contents and meanings

To give the flavour of Halliday's approach, I will select just three points. First, a bit of language (a 'text') cannot be understood or analysed in isolation from its context. Text is always 'in context'; language is not a set of autonomous rules. Speaking or writing is not a matter of following a set of rules; rather, they are a matter of making meaning by choices – this leads to the second point. A language makes available a set of choices, and it is by selecting from these choices that we make one meaning rather than another. Every word, phrase, intonation, stress or grammatical choice contributes to the delineation of what we want to say: our meaning. The point I would like to make about Halliday's linguistics is that any text or segment of a text can be analysed from three different points of view. First: what it is about – the content. Second: what sort of relationship it sets up between the utterer and the audience. Third: how it relates to its co-text; that is – what has gone before and what is coming later. This three dimensional analysis of text is very rich and flexible in a way that no uni-dimensional linguistic analysis can ever be.

These three features: analysing language in context; viewing language as a matter of choices, not rule-following; and the three dimensions of meaning in any stretch of text, taken together mean that Hallidayian linguistics is rich and flexible. Chomskian

linguists would say 'flabby and messy'. *Whereas other linguistic traditions only become usable by supplementing the syntactic base with an overlay of semantics and pragmatics, Hallidayian linguistics is an applied linguistics.*

Hard study

However, one warning is in order: Hallidayian linguistics is real linguistics; it is not a watered down 'pop' linguistics for teachers. To study it is a serious and difficult matter. For example, early this year, the staff of the Compensatory Education Department at Footscray College of TAFE hired a university lecturer for a week to take us through Halliday's latest book – even then, we only skimmed it superficially.

And so to genre theory itself. Genre theory was developed by Halliday's students and colleagues, Jim Markin and Joan Rothery, both in the Sydney University linguistics department, and Fran Christie, currently at Deakin University. Although it currently focuses on writing, genre theory also has implications for reading, even though these remain undeveloped at this stage.

Here are some of the main points of genre theory.

Genre Theory

1. Genre Theory focuses on whole texts, not on individual sentences. What this means is that it treats a piece of writing as a single utterance and sees the whole text as having a single meaning or purpose. This is the 'text-context' relationship.

2. The linguistic elements (paragraphs, sentences, phrases, wordings) of a text make a systematic contribution to the overall purpose or meaning of the text.

3. The grammar of writing is systematically different from the grammar of speaking. This means that: even though you say what you mean, you may not be able to write it. So, learning the grammar of speech (knowing how to speak) does not mean you have learnt the grammar of writing (knowing how to write). In fact, even something as fundamental as 'a grammatical sentence' may not even exist in speech. That is, we speak in clusters or clauses linked by 'intonation', not in 'grammatical sentences'. Or better: the way we speak is grammatical as speech, but is not grammatical as writing. If you tape yourself saying something and then write it down exactly, you will find that it does not come out as a grammatical sentence.

4. A further important difference between speech and writing, according to genre theorists, is that writing tends to be heavily nominalised, whereas speech is not. In writing we pack a lot of information into our noun phrases – as I have just done in the previous sentence by writing, "A further important difference between speech and writing", (which is a single noun phrase). In speech, I would have said: "And it's heavily nominalised, too", using the pronoun 'it' instead of the long, complex noun phrase.

5. Texts produced in similar contexts with similar purpose share important textual features and patterns. We can say these texts are instances of the same *genre*, and the features they share can be called *generic features*

6. Disadvantaged stu[illegible]d be taught the genres that ar[illegible]nd empowering within conte[illegible]afe.

7. Language learning is a collaboration between adults and children or teachers and students which operates as a 'scaffolding' within 'a zone of proximal development' (terms coined by Vygotsky). This means that: with the help of a teacher you can do or say something you can't do on your own. This assistance enables you to get a feel and understanding for it so that eventually you don't need assistance.

8. Writing instruction in recent times has been systematically skewed away from factual writing towards personal and creative writing, because writing has been the responsibility of English teachers. This has meant that many important genres within education and the wider community have been neglected.

If none of this seems too unreasonable, why is there so much heat in the air? Why do language theorists such as Garth Boomer and Bill Hannan call for a compromise or blending of the rival positions on literacy teaching?

To understand this, we need to look at the view of literacy teaching that has dominated the field over the recent past. I will call this view the 'process approach', an approach associated with the names: Graves, Goodman, Smith, Britton, Cambourne (amongst others). Although there are variations of emphasis, I think something like the following list characterises this ('process') approach.

Process Writing

1. Language should give voice to your own personal meanings. Therefore, teachers or adults who help you to say things are robbing you of your personal meanings and are simply enforcing conventional ways of saying things. Whatever is learnt in this way will be superficial, formulaic and disconnected from your own real thinking. This is often referred to in terms of 'fostering personal voice'.

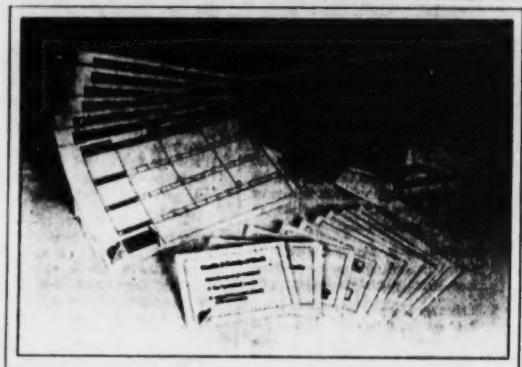
2. Learners can only learn, or say, what is meaningful to them. Thus, if you try to teach something or expect them to write something that is beyond their present framework of meaning, they will find it irrelevant, meaningless and boring. Thus, the role of the teacher is to be a facilitator, to provide motivation; not to be an instructor, and students should 'own their own writing': that is, they decide what to write, how to write it, and how to assess it, perhaps in 'negotiation' with a teacher.

3. The most important type of writing is writing that focuses on the personal experience of students. This 'personal writing' helps them make sense of themselves and their world by actively processing their own experience. Thus, personal writing, which focuses on immediate first-hand experience, relationships and emotions, is the most important type of writing within the literacy curriculum.

4. The linguistic features of language (grammar, punctuation, spelling, and so on) are not as important as the meaning or content of language. So, teachers of literacy should concentrate on the content or message, not the medium or linguistic forms used. If both students and teachers focus on the meaning, the rest (grammar, spelling, etc) will fall into place of their own accord.

Different approaches

The difference between the two approaches is clear. Fundamentally, they differ on two points: whether writing can or should be taught; and whether speech is different from writing. The process approach insists that meaning is paramount and that to give any attention to language on its own will destroy the capacity of meaning to find its own words; genre theorists, on the other hand, believe that meaning is identical with the language used to realise it and thus, attending to language is ipso facto (by its very nature) attending to meaning. The process approach insists that students should formulate their understandings in 'their own words'; while genre theorists believe that there are conventional wordings and structures publicly available. On the second difference, the process approach tends to view the differences between speech and writing mainly as matters of dialect, formality or politeness; while genre theorists view these differences as fundamental to the construction of modern knowledge and the power that goes with it.



The Progress Profile

From 1987-1989 ALBSU sponsored a two year research project with Nottingham University, to develop materials for the assessment of progress in adult literacy. Many schemes will have worked with these materials during the pilot phases, and during the training sessions offered recently by the Research Officer, Deryn Holland.

The Progress Profile is now available from ALBSU. It provides a framework for students to assess their progress, in terms of their own aims, and it also offers tutors and schemes a structure for considering the evaluation of progress more widely.

The Progress Profile is available as follows:

Binder, guidelines (for students and tutors), handbook (for tutors), prompt cards and assessment sheets:
£2.50 (plus p+p)

Binder, guidelines, assessment sheets:
£2.00 (plus p+p)

Assessment Sheets:
50p (plus p+p)

ALBSU phone number

From 6 May ALBSU's phone number changes to 071 405 4017 and the fax number becomes 071 404 5038.

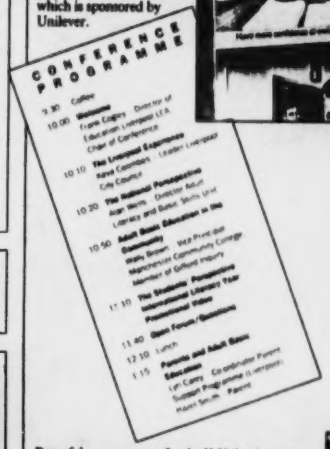
Councillor Geoffrey Wright, Chairman Solihull Education Committee, John Taylor, MP, and Richard Roxburgh, Project Leader, at the opening of Centre 159, Solihull on March 31.

Information

LOCAL EVENTS IN INTERNATIONAL LITERACY YEAR

Liverpool

Roger Lafferty, Chair, Continuing Education, Frank Cogley, Director of Education, Alan Wells, Director, ALBSU, viewing the Liverpool Exhibition, which is sponsored by Unilever.


CONFERENCE PROGRAMME
9.30 Coffee
10.00 Welcome
Frank Cogley Director of Education Liverpool LEA
Chair of Conference
10.10 The Liverpool Experience
Kevin Coombes Leader Liverpool City Council
10.20 The National Perspective
Alan Wells Director Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit
10.50 Adult Basic Education in the Community
Wally Brown Head Point Blue Manchester Community College
Member of Tyldesley Inquiry
11.10 The Umbrella Perspective International Literacy Year Promotional Video
11.40 Open Forum/Questions
12.10 Lunch
1.15 Parents and Adult Basic Education
Lyn Cope Co-ordinator Parents Support Programme (Liverpool)
Kevin Smith Parent

Part of the programme for the ILY Conference held in Liverpool Town Hall, 29th March 1990.

Franking

In Croydon Borough Council all post from the Town Hall is carrying this logo:

CROYDON
BOROUGH COUNCIL,
TABERNER HOUSE CROYDON.
ADULT BASIC EDUCATION
FOR HELP RING 681 2832

1990 INTERNATIONAL LITERACY YEAR

Ogwr Project Impact

To celebrate Youth and Literacy in International Literacy Year the Adult Basic Education Service and the Youth Service in Mid Glamorgan are working with the Big Deal Theatre Company, in a series of improvisations and activities, exploring a range of issues associated with literacy.

Below: Professor Valerie Meyer, from Southern Illinois University, Sue Straw, Advisory Tutor for Basic Education, Loughton College, and participants at Essex County Council's In-Service Training day, "Reading for Meaning", held on April 4 to celebrate ILY. This was the second of two events, with Val Meyer, held in the East Anglian Region.

New Readers

Further titles in the series published by Hodder & Stoughton in co-operation with ALBSU from the successful NEWMAT project.

The Collectors
by Marijulia Lloyd

A science fiction tale about a Field Trip that goes badly wrong . . . written by a student involved with the NEWMAT project.

Price: £1.95 plus p+p 1 copy 24p; 5 copies 90p.

About that Saturday Night
by Peter Beynon and Karen Beggs

A romance, played out against a background of racial tension.

Price: £1.95 plus p+p 1 copy 34p; 5 copies £1.95.

The Gatehouse, Warden Lane, Hexham NE46 1BL

Dear Editor

Over the last couple of years, I have been looking into aspects of literacy work with profoundly deaf adults, and currently work in sign language with students at both Prudhoe "Open Door" and the ABE Centre at Gateshead. (We were on BBC! "See Hear" recently!) I also wrote a paper on profound deafness and the teaching strategies involved, for the RSA Diploma Course at Ashington 1988/89.

I am aware that those of us working with the deaf often do so in isolation. Contacts say they wish there was some sort of network or means of sharing ideas or experience. Perhaps there are Centres who are aware of deaf adults who might benefit from support, but staff don't know where to start.

I wondered if anyone currently involved in ABE, and the "Wordpower" qualification in particular, might like to contact me at the above address, so that I could perhaps compile a simple "register" of like-minded people? I'd like to hear about what you are doing, what resources have been useful, how many students are involved, and a contact address in case I can put you in touch with others. All good ideas gratefully received.

Yvonne Clark
Northumberland County Council

BASIC EDUCATION SUPPORT IN AN F.E. SETTING

Chris Maples, Basic Education Co-ordinator, Wakefield District College, reviews a variety of effective support strategies.

BACKGROUND

In 1980 three separate colleges were amalgamated to form Wakefield District College and in 1981 the college became a tertiary college which is now one of the largest tertiary colleges in the country. Last year over 15,000 students enrolled on full and part-time courses. There are over 400 full-time and nearly 600 part-time teaching staff. The college is organised into 15 sectors, some having servicing roles across all other sectors including Maths and Communications and Languages sector.

Basic Education at the time of tertiary reorganisation was part of Adult Education, but there were links with mainstream college provision. When an across college working party, looking at English and Communications courses, recommended help and support for mainstream students who were not achieving their potential because of basic literacy difficulties, it was the Adult Basic Education staff who were identified as having the skills to help. Our role was to be extended to take into account the support work for students on mainstream courses as well as the role of helping adults with literacy and numeracy difficulties.

INITIAL DEVELOPMENTS

The first objective was to develop a flexible, open access provision which could cater for both the adult student coming in off the street and the college student wanting to negotiate time within a very busy timetable for extra help. The English workshop was opened in 1983 (see ALBSU Newsletter, Summer 1988) as an initial response to the need for support for students on mainstream courses. The new provision was publicised with posters throughout college and handouts for college staff giving information about the workshop as a mode of delivery, why the workshop had been developed, who it was for and how they could refer students to it. Staff were also approached through team and sector meetings.

In the initial stages the workshop was seen as a central place where students would come for extra support. We found this worked well for those students who have come to terms with their literacy difficulty and are well motivated to do something about it. However, there are students who need support and who for a number of reasons would never find their way to the workshop:

- a very full timetable
- in an annex away from the main site
- embarrassment
- lack of motivation
- lack of information about the workshop
- peer group pressure
- tutors unsure how to approach students with the difficulty
- at college to learn practical skill – not writing!

There is an assumption that with a large college population to draw from there is a ready market of students queuing up to use the workshop, but our experience is to the contrary, it is very difficult to attract mainstream students to provision without going some way towards breaking down the barriers with students, and raising awareness amongst members of staff concerning students with literacy difficulties.

IDENTIFYING STUDENTS WHO NEED SUPPORT

Significant to the development of basic skills support in the college was an initiative set up by the Principal of the College to identify the extent of the need for support throughout the college. All mainstream students would do an English comprehension and numeracy test when they first enter college in September. As ABE practitioners we all had misgivings about using formal tests in this way but with the numbers of students involved there was no other way. The significance of the test was that it:

- identified early in the course many individual students likely to need support
- identified groups of students likely to need support
- identified the courses likely to attract students who need support
- identified the tutor we needed to liaise with
- generally opened up dialogue with tutors
- it gave us a provisional figure of identified need for support within the college student population

The administration of the test was co-ordinated from the English Workshop, but course tutors administered the test to the students and then returned the marked tests to us for collation and follow up. In order to facilitate the process nominated tutors distributed the tests in their sectors and acted as a contact point for both sector and ABE staff. These tutors then gave us access to information about the sectors, the courses they ran and the staff who taught them.

Although hard work at a time of year when we are at our busiest, the process of testing the students has given the English Workshop a high profile throughout college, made tutors aware of our presence, our role, and the service we could offer. It gave us some status because the Principalship were supporting the initative and it opened up a dialogue with large numbers of the college staff at all levels.

We have tested the new student intake each September as part of the induction week since September 1984.

The test is only a crude measure of students needs. We never depend on it as a diagnostic tool without consulting tutors and informally assessing students on a 1:1 basis. In no way does the test identify all the students who need support during their time at college and for these students we depend on publicity to initiate self referral or referrals from course tutors.

Results:

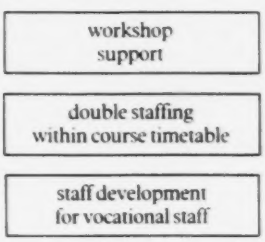
Reading Age	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*
Under 13 years	11.8	13.7	12.0	10.3
13 – 15 years	7.6	8.0	7.9	8.3
15 – 16 years	5.9	7.5	10.8	7.3
Over 16 years	74.7	70.8	69.3	74.1

Information gained from testing the students allowed us to move forward with extra teaching hours and an opportunity to look at alternative and effective ways of helping the students identified as needing extra support.

THREE STRANDS OF SUPPORT

We have tried to develop a system which can support students in any of three ways. Those students who most need support may benefit from all three approaches.

Student



Workshop support

If a student has been identified as needing extra support initial contact is with the course tutors to determine the most appropriate way of helping the student. This usually means the course tutor talking to the student about visiting the workshop and arranging an initial visit when we can negotiate times and informally assess needs.

Some students refer themselves, often having received information about workshop support from course tutors or from a group visit to the workshop during induction week, when we chat to students and give out leaflets. During Spring Term we often remind tutors, via memos in pigeon holes, about the support provision for students who may well have discovered a need for help after mock exams or in the period leading up to examinations. Students can gain confidence if they work on specific aspects related to the exams and their individual problems.

Mainstream students have to be introduced to the workshop and assessed with as much sensitivity as the adult student. They reject anything that reminds them of school, they are often extremely sensitive to remedial images and they are not always as well motivated as adult students. The last thing many of them want to do is 'English', so work programmes have to be specific to the course needs, reflect the students' interests and structured to allow students to feel progress is being made. Separate sessions for full-time students over the twilight period work particularly well for some students although others respond to working amongst well motivated adults.

Double staffing

Much of the success of the support work depends on the links between basic skills staff and course tutors. If students are identified as needing help we negotiate with the tutor the best way of helping the students. When a number of students on a course need our support we can negotiate double staffing. This is more often part of the communications element of the course. Double staffing allows the student intensive help when they need it and the opportunity to work on specific difficulties without being separated from the course group. From experience we have found that staff work better in a double staffing situation if the members of staff are clear about their roles. Staff development time has been used to look at this issue with vocational and support staff.

The group identified the support tutors role as:

1. Improving students' communication skills both generally and vocationally
2. Bringing the expertise and resources of the English Workshop to the group
3. Helping students recognise and overcome their language difficulties
4. Devising strategies to meet individual needs
5. Helping vocational tutor meet curriculum objectives
6. Working closely with vocational tutor to devise suitable schemes of work and reviewing the scheme throughout the year to meet the needs of the group.

Working patterns for a double staffed session can vary with different groups and tutors, the pattern can change throughout the year or be influenced by the time of year – coming up to exam time tutors may introduce exam techniques to the whole group or, after work experience, run a session on writing up the report.

Working patterns can include support tutor:

working as a 'floating' tutor helping students as and when they need it

withdrawing small groups to work on specific areas for short lengths of time

splitting the class in two for a given period

concentrating on a few individuals whilst keeping a general eye on all

taking over the whole group to cover a single specific topic.

Apart from the direct benefit to the student of double staffing, both tutors involved benefit greatly from the presence of the other and there is cross fertilization of experience and specific skills. The support tutor gains some insight into the course the students are following and the language work involved on the course. The vocational tutor gains awareness of the difficulties the students with literacy problems face on their course and absorbs some of the strategies for overcoming the difficulties. Both tutors will have to consider the most effective mode of delivery to make the best use of the support tutor's time which should encourage a more flexible approach to classroom practice.

Important factors for effective double staffing are:

1. Whilst roles of the two tutors are different the status is equal
2. There is constant open liaison between both members of staff
3. There is joint planning of the scheme of work and constant review
4. There is joint development of assignment and resources
5. Establishment of flexible modes of delivery so the needs of all students can be met.

Staff development within sectors

At the beginning of our work with mainstream students we identified a pressing need for staff development. We needed to raise awareness and provide opportunities for looking at classroom practice in order to develop strategies and approaches to help students struggling with their course work because of literacy difficulties. We felt that because of the limited time we could give to students there must be benefits if students were also getting support and positive feedback from course tutors.

We had developed close links with the catering sectors before we started testing student, and had been involved in helping them to identify students who may need help. Through the close liaison with catering staff questions were raised

concerning how they could best help the students and back up the work we were doing. They identified spelling as an area they felt unsure about. They particularly asked how they could mark work in a way that would help with a spelling difficulty. This led to staff meeting slots being used to run a short course on spelling with the aim of raising their awareness about spelling issues and, through a practical task, looking at approaches to helping their students. These sessions were very well received and led to many other questions which in turn posed the question of how we were going to help to develop the skills of the staff in the long term.

As a pilot scheme we established an ABE member of staff, with a number of flexible hours, in the sector. The hours would be used to identify the needs of staff and students on catering courses, consider the literacy demands of the course and whether the teaching methods demanded the same level of skill as the course and to look at the teaching methods and approaches appropriate for the course and the students on the course. This, and work done as part of an ALBSU Project, developing bridging courses for literacy students, indicated how successful this approach could be. It was decided to extend the work into the construction sector in the following academic years and in consecutive years to other sectors on all three college sites.

When making initial moves to work directly with the sector staff there are difficulties to overcome and it is imperative the support tutor adopt a softly, softly approach and concentrate in the first instance on building relationships with staff and breaking down barriers.

We have to be aware that:

- attitudes may differ from ours – "why do they need help anyway when they are only here to learn about cars"!
- some vocational staff are aware of their own limitations – they have acquired their skills 'on the job' not via an academic route, they therefore feel very threatened by our presence
- there is a lack of awareness about the literacy demands of the course and their teaching methods – they may not have even thought about it
- vocational staff may have no guidelines for identifying or helping students with literacy problems
- they may be unsure of how to approach students with literacy problems
- priorities may not be the same as ours
- they may not be aware of our role and how we can help.

Even though as co-ordinator I have introduced sector support work through senior management meetings, sector and group meetings, for the members of staff working on the ground it is much easier to start establishing relationships if working with individuals and small groups of staff. It is important to gain the support of the heads of sector and to establish a starting point, usually in the form of a link person or course team.

When we started sector support work with the construction sector a senior lecturer, who was sympathetic to our aims, was the link person and he set up a meeting of lecturers teaching on the bricklaying course. The lecturers obviously found me and the situation threatening but relaxed after I explained what we were trying to do and that we had much to learn from them if we were to help the students. The tutors were obviously concerned about their students and were 'willing to have a go' and look at ways of helping them.

Sector support work has involved the basic skills staff in:

- meeting vocational members of staff informally to build positive relationships and open up a dialogue
- observing vocational teaching to determine aspects which the students have most difficulty with
- visiting students on site and observing practical workshop sessions
- looking closely at syllabi, text books, worksheets, exam papers, assignments and other resources used in order to determine literacy demands of these elements of the course
- matching these elements to the actual demands of the course and the students involved
- in the light of information gained discussion with vocational staff about teaching strategies and approaches which would help all students cope more effectively with the course, but especially those students with literacy difficulties
- talking to individual students about their difficulties and looking at most appropriate ways of overcoming them
- acting as a link between sector and English workshop

There is a gradual cascading of the work done within the sectors as other members of staff become involved in conversation about the work and see the results of resource development in course specific worksheets, and workbooks produced jointly between vocational staff and sector support staff. They begin to get involved and ask for help.

Course specific worksheets have been developed by all sectors concerned and we now have a substantial bank of resources related to vocational courses as well as workbooks on more general topics but with subject specific examples. Topics include taking notes, answering the question in an exam, planning and reference skills, etc.

The worksheets and books developed aim to:

- introduce the language of the course to students
- give information which is well organised and structured
- use graphics which make the information more accessible
- allow the student to interact with the information
- allows reinforcement of learning
- gives students access to the language of course textbooks.

The development of course/subject specific worksheets has involved much discussion about language usage and learning strategies and has introduced alternative models of good practice into the sectors.

Support work in Leisure and Recreation Sector resulted in a course for staff on study skills, involving the staff in practical tasks using course materials and assignments.

Vocational staff have become much more aware of the role of Basic Skills work within the college and are much more likely to refer students to us for help and to approach the workshop for advice or resources for use with their students.

CONCLUSION

Developing basic skills work within the college has meant a tremendous amount of work for all involved. It has given us the opportunity to work with a substantial number of young people who need our support and who have been given the chance to show their potential. It has involved us in areas of work which were completely new to us, but work which has extended our skills and has enhanced the provision for all our students. Being deeply involved with college provision across all sectors h... opened up routes of progression for adult students accessing education through our Basic Education provision. We can refer them to a varietey of other workshops, Access courses, Wider Opportunities provision, or we can link them to appropriate named individuals to discuss courses in any of the sectors and we can support them in the 'moving on' process.

As demographic trends change the balance of the student population, basic skills support will be an important part of the support network for the increasing numbers of adult students coming into College. The skill of the Basic Education tutor in dealing flexibly and informally with groups and individual students of all levels and ages, with a variety of backgrounds and needs, will be an increasingly useful resource within the Further Education Sector.

KENNETH BROOKSBANK

Kenneth Brooksbank, the former chairman of ALBSU's Management Committee, died suddenly on 4 February 1990. In this article Alan Wells, ALBSU's Director, provides a personal appreciation of Ken Brooksbank.

Before the term 'public servant' became used by some politicians as a calculated insult, Ken Brooksbank would have been aptly described as a 'devoted public servant'. His long and distinguished career in the education service was all about helping people to get the very best education possible and throughout his career he was widely known for his support for teachers – people he saw as at the 'sharp end' of the education service. As Chief Education Officer of Birmingham he probably visited more schools and attended more school events than any of his predecessors because he believed that demonstrating your support for those 'doing the job' was as important as talking about it. He often suggested that he and his wife held the world record for attending the most swimming galas!

Ken Brooksbank had had an outstanding career before he became involved in adult literacy and basic skills. After distinguished service in the Navy during the war (although ever a modest man, he never talked about his D.S.C and bar), he became a leading figure in education, primarily in Birmingham, until his retirement in 1977. He was Deputy Education Officer under Sir Lionel Russell for a number of years before becoming the Chief Education Officer of Birmingham in the late 1960s.

Under his leadership, secondary education in Birmingham was reorganised, the first experiment in community education in the City took place and the administrative and inspectorial functions of the Education Department were restructured. All of this and more was achieved through unremitting hard work and with the help of a loyal and devoted staff. During the same period he also found the time to play an active part in education nationally and internationally.

Although I worked as Adult Literacy Organiser in Birmingham between 1973-75, I never met Ken Brooksbank during that time. (I often reminded him that he managed to miss me out in a line of people waiting to greet him at some long forgotten event and I ended up shaking hands with his wife). I first met him in early 1978 when he became Chairman of the Management Committee of the Adult Literacy Unit. Some people thought that this would be an easy and undemanding 'retirement job'; others thought that he should not waste his time on a small, short-life unit concerned with an unimportant area of education seen as 'last year's good cause'.

Ken Brooksbank never saw his involvement with adult literacy and basic skills, however, as anything other than worthwhile and he worked tirelessly to ensure that basic education for adults was established as a high priority in every sector of the education service. So tirelessly, in fact, that few remembered that his involvement, and the considerable amount of time he gave to basic education and ALBSU, was entirely a voluntary activity. He was instrumental, at a time when a relatively new government had considerable doubts about central units and basic education, in convincing the then Secretary of State, Mark Carlisle (now Lord Carlisle) and the Under-Secretary, Rhodes Boyson to establish ALBSU in 1980 and in encouraging successive Ministers of the need for a more permanent arrangement rather than a series of short periods of funding.

As Chairman and Director we were an unlikely pair with apparently little in common. Yet the longer I worked with Ken Brooksbank the more I grew to respect his knowledge and wisdom. He was a demanding Chairman, who politely dismissed inadequately thought out or poorly written papers; he was disappointed if you fell below the standards he thought you were capable of; he had little time for empty rhetoric or sloganising and was not afraid to say unpopular things or dampen ill-considered enthusiasms. Yet he rarely lost his temper or showed annoyance and was always willing to listen to an opposing point of view. He did not believing that changing your mind was a sign of weakness or that aiming for consensus was anything but admirable.

I shall remember most of all his personal loyalty and integrity and the constant support he gave me. He was always available at the end of the phone and only too willing to spare the time to talk through problems. Unlikely pair as we were, we became firm friends by the time he retired as the Chairman of ALBSU's Management Committee in December 1988. A family man devoted to his wife, children and grandchildren he will be much missed by everyone who benefited from his wise counsel and his unswerving support for basic education.

Lifescope 1 and 2

by Susan Gates

Published by Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

Price: £3.75 each

ISBN 0 198311 59 1 & 0 198311 60 5

These books are clearly intended for school pupils. The cover of Book 2 shows a group of young people in school uniform.

The blurb is addressed to the school pupils and explains that the books will help them to 'gain confidence in skills which you *will* need at work and in your personal life'.

However, the books are full of ideas which could be adapted for use with groups of young people who have left school, e.g. YTS trainees.

The emphasis is on activities. These are a mixture of literacy/numeracy tasks – e.g. writing letters and cheques, filling in forms, keeping accounts and making money calculations; and personal/social skills, e.g. decision making, planning, negotiating and persuading.

The layout is clear. Topics are easy to find and most pages are broken up with illustrations, tables, cartoons, etc.

Young people with poor literacy skills will not be able to use these books independently. There is just too much writing on most pages and the language is often quite complicated.

All in all, they could be useful source books for tutors of young people but need digesting and adapting before trainees/students will find the material accessible.

Christine Cox
Basic Skills Co-Ordinator,
Youth Education Service, Bristol

A Cloze Thing

by Hugh and Margaret Brown

Published by Brown and Brown, Keeper's Cottage, Westward, Wigton, Cumbria CA7 8NQ

Price £1.80 including p&p

ISBN 1 870696 16 1

There is always a welcome in our ABE scheme when a new title appears in the Brown and Brown catalogue, for the authors, well-versed in the needs of literacy students and tutors, usually deliver resources which are adult-based, relevant and topical.

This book is no exception. It contains a selection of cloze exercises based on other literacy materials such as 'Spirals' and 'Bull's Eye' as well as newspapers, the Radio Times and holiday brochures. The passages are printed in random order, ungraded, so that students can choose those they prefer. However, there is an indication in the introduction of the different kinds or groups of missing words, while at the end of the book in the Subject Index, tutors can find under the heading 'Easier Reading' ten fairly basic extracts.

Obviously in the ideal situation tutors prepare relevant cloze exercises for individual students or groups where appropriate. This book however is a most useful aid in the classroom or in the book-box for outreach classes. Cloze exercises encourage reading with understanding, choosing words with care, as well as spelling and writing and what better than to have some like these readily available for students to browse through. The answers – or suggested answers – are at the back, but students are encouraged to think of alternatives. Topics include the environment, holidays, unemployment, famous people and many others – a selection indeed to interest most people.

Ros Lacey
Head of Basic Skills Unit
Hillingdon Education Authority

Correct Me If I'm Wrong

by Rosemary Moor

Published by Stanley Thomas

Price £2.95

ISBN 0 85950 713 0

"Correct Me If I'm Wrong" offers itself as 'a practical approach to improving written English'. It offers advice on how teachers and pupils should use its contents: for exercise to overcome specific problems, as a reference for correct usage and as a guide offering seven suggestions for improving spelling. The individual page lay-outs offer upper and lower case of various sizes and type-sets as well as emboldening. There are photo-copyable worksheets at the back of the book.

This book should be avoided by Adult Literacy schemes for the following reasons:

1. It is child centred, as references to 'teacher' and 'pupil' in the introduction indicate.
2. The subject matter of the examples is school centred – e.g. "I expect he will attend school as soon as he's well".
3. The mixture of upper and lower case typefaces and sizes on the page layouts is confusing.
4. While selling itself as "jargon-free", it becomes grammatically unsound in its attempts to speak of prepositions and conjunctions as "weak words" which "weaken sentences".

Meg Mayhew
Northamptonshire Adult Education Service
Northamptonshire Education Authority

Gypsy of Bangladesh

by Rehana Rahman

Published by Parrot Press. Distributed from Tower Hamlets Institute, Language Department, Mile End Centre, English Street, London E3 4TA. Tel: 01-981 6580

Price: £2.00 + postage

ISBN 1 8701 73 15 5

This story was written in Bengali for the author's daughter, Jabin. It follows the lives of the Bedh tribes people in Bangladesh, down rivers, in villages and through the seasons, encouraging us to think of lifestyles very different from our own. The language is mainly simple and suitable for people who are gaining confidence in reading and also for children who can listen if it is read aloud to them.

This is a delightful book. The text weaves merrily through the colourful pictures of rivers, villages, trees and boats. The writing is bold and clear and the gaps between lines facilitate reading. All the villagers in the pictures are smiling. I like the simplicity of the story and the clarity of description.

I admire the author for translating her book into English and Shahida Zubair for her Urdu translation.

However, there are a few mistakes in translation and the English is incorrect in some places. For example: "Tll tell you a tale about the Bedh, the gypsy" should probably be: "Tll tell you a tale about the Bedh, the gypsies", or something similar. I found a capital R instead of a small r in one place. There are corresponding mistakes in the Urdu version. However, it would have been a pity if the book had remained untranslated, for it is well written and presented.

Amites Sarkar
Student
Croydon Education Authority

Practical Maths for Woodwork

by Liz Elsie and Ruth Nelson

Published by ILEA Curriculum Development Project, Westminster College, Room 273, Battersea Park Road, London SW11 4JR

Price: £4.75

This spiral-bound pack was developed jointly by a numeracy and a woodwork tutor on a women-only furniture-making course. It is arranged in thirteen sections each concentrating on a particular topic or skill. These include measurements (metric and imperial), percentages, elementary geometry, costing exercises and an assessment test. The sections consist of a set of worksheets preceded by "teachers' notes" outlining their aims; an explanation of how the worksheets were used; and a brief evaluation of the sessions.

The emphasis throughout the pack is for students to use practical approaches to the maths needed for woodwork. Students are encouraged to discover methods which *they* are happy with; not to carry out calculations by remembering formulae.

The pack is clearly written, and well-presented with good illustrations – vital features for any numeracy pack. Since it is presented primarily as a pack of materials developed from a *particular* course, it does not claim to be a comprehensive guide for other tutors.

It would be most useful as a resource for numeracy/maths tutors who teach craft students and would be of only limited use to craft tutors unless they are fairly confident in their own mathematical abilities. Since a lot of craft tutors often have to struggle with teaching the maths required for their particular skill, it is a pity this pack did not address itself to *their* needs. For example, it might have listed other materials which would be of interest and use to craft/skills tutors, and with which they probably would not be familiar.

It makes a refreshing change to see a numeracy pack developed by women for women in a "non-traditional" area!

Daian Marsh
ALBSU Numeracy Development Co-ordinator,
Wandsworth Education Authority

Assessing Progress

by Scottish Community Education Council

Published by Scottish Community Education Council, West Coates House, 90 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh EH12 5LQ

Price: £2.95 including p&p

This spiral bound book is another useful publication from SCEC for anyone involved in tutoring in ABE. The book is in two sections covering Initial Assessment and On-Going Assessment but acknowledges the transferability of some examples. Practical strategies, emphasising the student-centred nature of assessment, are suggested. The Initial Assessment examples are realistic and give hints on how to overcome students' initial anxieties, encourage their involvement, help them to self-assess and declare what they want to learn. It alerts the reader to the threat of tests but also suggests how testing could be managed. The samples are clearly explained and presented and offer examples of materials which could be readily used in a wide range of situations.

The On-Going Assessment section strongly advocates the importance of assessment to all learning and how the process belongs to and should be controlled by the student. The link between record-keeping and assessment is made but the embedding of such processes into good practice could have been more heavily emphasised. Again, the examples in this section are clear and practical and acknowledge that some students need to prepare for tests and exams for the future.

The importance of assessing progress in ABE is increasingly being recognised and this book de-mystifies much of what that means. Some sections would have benefited from more efficient proof-reading but the layout and type setting are clear and well spaced.

Any book which promotes good practice, gives practical suggestions and encourages student control of learning is to be welcomed. I would recommend this book for tutors and tutor trainers as a useful resource.

Jan Eldred
Assistant Education Officer
Rotherham Education Authority

Microcomputer Review

Snakes and Ladders

Published by Joseph Priestley Institute of Further Education, 71 Queen Street, Morley, Leeds LS27 8DZ

Price: £12.50

Micro: BBC B, B+, Master, Concept Keyboard optional.

Snakes and Ladders is a computer version of the board game, for one or two players, in which progress is determined by the throw of a die and by answering questions. Start-up conditions (e.g. size of board) are alterable, and question files (literacy, numeracy, quiz) can be created and stored.

The program is easy to use and has a vitality of the whizz, flash, zoom, play a tune variety (fortunately, you can turn the sound off). Animated graphics (of appeal to a junior audience) are effectively used, but at times there is insufficient colour contrast for easy reading of on-screen messages. The program provides an arena in which to "do sums": numeracy questions pose sums using numbers of three or less digits and one of the four basic operators. Literacy questions involve guessing a word, given one or more letters, but no context. The latter seems of dubious value: why should I get a snake because I guess "get" instead of "god" for a three letter word starting with "g"? If a wrong answer is input, the correct – or required –

answer is shown, but there is no other help available. Thus, it's practice without drill, or, since for each player you can get a score and a list of which questions were correctly/incorrectly answered, covert "testing". Children, to whom the user interface is geared, may certainly find the program attractive, but it's not one I would have any reason to purchase for adults.

Pat Lloyd
Adult Basic Education Organiser
The Berridge Centre, Nottingham Education Authority

Pat and Tom Reading Scheme

by Elaine Evans and Pat Heaton

Available from: Clive Stranger, c/o The Pickup Unit, Barnsley College of Technology, Church Street, Barnsley SL70 2AY

Price: £10 inc. p+p for the set of ten books

This series of "structured readers" is designed on the phonic principles which have been advocated by the Dyslexia Association for use with children (Alpha to Omega by Hornsby and Shear is quoted as a source in the foreword). The content and style is reminiscent of the old Tom and Sheila books which were widely in use in the early years of the literacy campaign. They do not, however, contain such witty illustrations as those for which that series was noted.

The print in the first few books is large and clearly set out with few words per page. The print becomes smaller as the later, more complex books are reached. The series has a somewhat home-made appearance.

No regard seems to have been given in these books to the importance of context, to normal patterns of adult speech or to developments in ABE practitioners' ideas about the sort of materials and methods which are suitable for adults. A quote from the text might illustrate this point: "Today Pam has to get a job. Today Pam has to go to the big shop and get a job. Pam must get a job today."

It could be that some beginner readers who are very keen on structure and who wish to relive the 'school reader' experience and try to succeed second time round might find these books of use. I have not ordered them for our resource base because my colleagues and I no longer consider this type of material to be helpful to adults learning to read.

Linda Lever
ABE Resources Organiser
Liverpool Education Authority

Short Notices

Maths and Dyslexics

by Anne Henderson

Published by St. Davids College, Llandudno

Price: £5.50

ISBN 0 9512529 1 7

This book describes a method to help people who have learning difficulties with number. It is divided into mathematical topics, each with a 'How to Help' section. Although aimed at teachers and parents of children with maths learning needs, it could easily be adapted for use with adults.

Peaches, Lions and Heroes – In the Words of Local People

Published by Rhythm Tree Arts, Wolverhampton

Price: £1.30

ISBN 0 961 5386 0 8

This book comprises a collection of memories and reminiscences of local people in Wolverhampton and is likely to promote a lot of discussion. The print is attractive although the layout of some of the text could cause confusion for beginner readers. It is full of old photographs, drawings cartoons and adverts and could stimulate similar compilations of local history.

What Is Health? – core booklet plus accompanying titles 'Drugs', 'Stress' and 'Food'

Published by Oxford University Press

Price: £2.50 each

ISBN 0 19 832622X, 0 19 8326238, 0 19 8326246 and 0 19 8326262

A series of booklets which aims to provide people with an opportunity to challenge their ideas about issues of health and society. Aimed primarily at 16-19 year olds who are interested in Health Education, these books may also be a useful resource for working with older adults.

Also Received

'Bird Habitats' Resources for Basic Literacy and the National Curriculum

Published by Taking Wing Education Resources, Cornwall

Price: £15.00 plus £1.50 p+p

ISBN 1 87 2686005

Listen to Me Talking Survival

Available from the Gatehouse Project, St Lukes, Sawley Road, Miles Platting, Manchester M10 8DB

Price: £1.50

ISBN 0 90 6283306

Colin's Poems

by Colin Davenport

Published by The Blackburn and Darwen ABE Scheme, Harrison Centre, Lower Hollin Bank Street, Blackburn, Lancs

Price: £1.00

The ALBSU Newsletter is published four times a year, in November, February, May and July. Copies are available, free, to organisations and individuals. We aim to publish articles of interest to those teaching in adult literacy, second language and basic skills, those who are responsible for funding and organising the provision, and those who are generally interested in these important areas of work.

If you have ideas on topics which you would like to see covered, please contact the Editor, at ALBSU. Reviews of relevant publications are written for the newsletter by practitioners, and we are interested to receive publications which could be useful in basic education.

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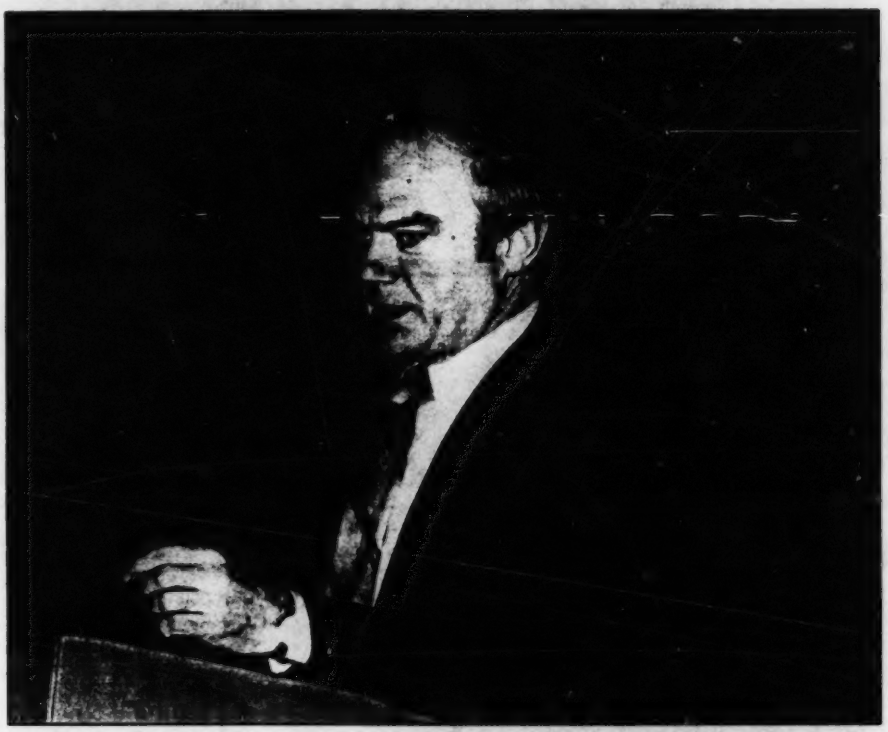
Adult Literacy & Basic Skills Unit

NEWSLETTER



"Employers should give priority to literacy and basic skills because they are the foundation of occupational competency".

Sir Brian Wolfson, Chairman, National Training Task Force, addressing ALBSU's Annual Conference on June 20, 1990

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SETTING THE AGENDA IN THE 1990s

ALBSU's Annual Conference took place on 20 June 1990. The Conference was opened by the Patron of International Literacy Year, Her Royal Highness, The Princess Royal and the Keynote Address was delivered by the Rt Hon John MacGregor, Secretary of State for Education and Science. The Conference was very much about setting the agenda for basic skills work in the 1990s – a decade likely to be significantly different from the 1970s and 1980s.

SCALE OF NEED

Considering basic skills work in the next decade was particularly timely as a small-scale survey of literacy needs amongst young people had been launched by ALBSU just before the Conference took place. Surveys and research into literacy standards are becoming commonplace, largely because of interest in whether standards are declining. Recent research initially seems to indicate a worrying decline in reading skills amongst 7 year olds, although some doubt has been placed on the methods used in the research. Whilst 7 year olds are not the concern of adult literacy programmes there is strong evidence that those children who are doing very poorly in primary school often end up with inadequate skills when they finish compulsory schooling.

The small scale survey commissioned by ALBSU and funded by the Wates Foundation and the Dulverton Trust is little more than indicative of need and we would not claim that it is definitive. Moreover, it is based on self assessment rather than more objective measures and this is not necessarily the best indicator of need. The survey did reveal, however, that of the 1,000 young people between the ages of sixteen and twenty questioned throughout England and Wales, over a quarter said that they had had some problems with reading since leaving school and more than a third admitted to problems with spelling. Almost one in five said that they experienced difficulties in applying for jobs as well as filling in forms. Only 5% of those questioned had sought any help with literacy since leaving school although more than a third said that they would like help to improve their basic skills.

A PRIORITY

In opening the Conference, The Princess Royal contrasted the desire for education she saw on her travels in developing countries with the way people in industrialised countries appear to take education very much for granted. Yet, she went on to say, literacy skills were the most important skills for everyone particularly as they were crucial for much further education and training. She said how impressed she had been by the students she had met during her visits in International Literacy Year and urged everyone involved in literacy work to encourage and support adults who wanted to improve their basic skills.

John MacGregor told the Conference that all Local Education Authorities should

Research Findings

- *25% of 16-20 year olds said that they had difficulties with reading*
- *35% of 16-20 year olds said that they had difficulties with spelling*

The Sample included:
–48% in work
–26% students
–16% unemployed
–9% Youth Training Scheme
–1% Employment Training

Reading Habits

- *Overall 43% rarely or never read books*
  - *–among males 53%*
  - *–among females 32%*
  - *–among 16-17 year olds 46%*
  - *–among 20 year olds 31%*

Problems with Reading

- *Overall 18% had problems reading official forms*
  - *–among unemployed 25%*
- *Among unemployed 17% had problems reading job application forms*
- *Among employed 7% had problems reading job application forms*

Problems with Spelling

- *Overall 21% had problems filling forms*
  - *–among unemployed 25%*
  - *–among 16-17 year olds 25%*
  - *–among 20 year olds 16%*

Photo by Tony Oliver

Mrs Jean Edwards, Chairman of the Trustees of the Wates Foundation, Alan Wells, Director, ALBSU, Sophie Lawrence, Diane in East Enders and Lady Plowden, Chairman of ALBSU's Co-ordinating Committee for International Literacy Year, at the press conference announcing the results of a research survey into the reading and writing habits of young people. The survey was funded by the Wates Foundation and the Dulverton Trust.

find out the need for adult literacy and basic skills tuition in their area and make meeting those needs a priority. He said that whilst he recognised that great strides had been made in developing literacy programmes and improving the quality of the tuition available, he knew that provision was 'patchy' and felt the monitoring and evaluation needed to be improved. As far as standards were concerned, he said that:

"Literacy, of course, is relative to our expectations and aspirations. What is an acceptable standard varies, not only from country to country, but also from individual to individual. Even more important perhaps, the requirements of literacy change over time.

For literacy is a moving target. It shifts in line with the demands of society and the aspirations of individuals. In our own times, the shift to a service economy and the introduction of information technology have sharply increased the requirement for basic skills at all levels. In our personal lives too, increased demands are placed on us as parents, consumers and citizens. If we are to meet the demands of society and employers, we must seek to raise the standards of literacy faster than in the past."

NEW STATUS

The Secretary of State also announced that ALBSU is to acquire corporate and charitable status as an independent body and would cease to operate as an agency of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE). The Department of Education and Science will continue to pay grant direct to ALBSU as at present. He went on to say, "ALBSU has established itself as the recognised central focus for adult literacy and basic skills work in England and Wales. It has much to contribute to developments in training and further education as well as adult education. It will need to relate to many agencies across the whole range of provision, whilst maintaining essential links with other bodies in adult education. I do not doubt that the new ALBSU will respond to the opportunities and challenges of the future with the same vigour and imagination that it has shown in the past".

In thanking the Secretary of State, ALBSU's Chairman, Peter Davis, welcomed the change in the Unit's status, particularly as it reflected the reality of ALBSU's operation. He emphasised that the Unit would be keen to develop strong and constructive links with NIACE and thanked the Institute for all their support over the years.

VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

Usha Prashar, Director of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations thought that the role of Local Education Authorities as the primary providers of adult literacy and basic skills tuition would change in the next few years. She felt that voluntary organisations were able to reach groups and individuals that LEA institutions were unlikely to be able to reach but recognised that without secure funding it was difficult for the voluntary sector to get involved in basic skills work. She said that voluntary organisations had a role to play in empowering people through the acquisition of basic skills and should not just become a vehicle for delivering government programmes.

TEC's

The newly knighted Sir Brian Wolfson, Chairman of the National Training Task Force, said that he was pleased to have the opportunity to emphasise the importance of basic skills in employment and enterprise since individuals with these needs represent an under-utilised resource which we cannot afford to ignore. He said that demographic and employment changes in the next few years meant that employers would need to recruit from previously under-represented groups as well as re-train and upgrade the skills of the existing workforce.

He welcomed the close cooperation which had developed between the Training Agency and ALBSU and hoped that this cooperation would continue as Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) began to be established. He said that the National Training Task Force was trying to ensure that TEC's Business Plans addressed the needs of specific groups including people with literacy, numeracy and language needs. He said that he felt that a TEC declaration of the importance of basic skills coupled with no indication of how these needs were to be met, is not acceptable.

Sir Brian ended his speech by saying:

"The prospects for people with basic skills needs are better than they were because of the increased emphasis on literacy, numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages within education and training programmes but they could be better still. Working together the Training Agency, TECs and ALBSU have much to contribute to this important area and thereby benefit the lives of a great proportion of people in this country".

'LEARN TO LEARN' IN ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

Margaret Teale, Regional Training Officer, Community Education, Lothian Regional Council and Mary Ballantyne, Adult Basic Education Organiser, West Lothian, explain why 'Learn to Learn' was developed, and how it works.

Background

The stimulus for initiating a pilot learn to learn programme for students in Adult Basic Education in West Lothian was three fold. Firstly, research from an MSc. dissertation[1] on student drop out from ABE tuition revealed that many of the ex students interviewed had expectations of the ABE tuition which were at odds with the philosophy and principles as we practised them. This led us to think further about the different models of education in our society, the underlying reasons for ABE principles and practice and the emphasis which is placed on the development of equal student tutor relationships. It seemed irrational to have a commitment to the development of equal relationships and student centred learning when we spent ten weeks training voluntary tutors and only a short interview with potential students which hardly began to address the thinking behind ABE practice.

It seemed then that we required to spend more time with students exploring their perceptions and experience of education and their expectations of the learning process they were about to enter into. Whilst we had always investigated the goals the students wished to achieve, we did not have a clear strategy which offered options to those who did not have definite well thought out goals nor a framework which allowed us to investigate with them how effective learning took place.

Secondly, we had a concern over the level of student drop-outs in the first few weeks of tuition. It had been recognised for some time that some students found the methods used in ABE unfamiliar and that they were particularly unwilling to accept responsibility for setting their own learning goals or indeed accept responsibility for their own learning.

Thirdly, linked with this concern, was an awareness that we did not involve students sufficiently in the evaluation and measurement of progress. Whilst we had developed a model for regularly looking at progress with students there was a feeling that if students were not able to express what they wished to achieve and did not understand what they were learning then it was not possible to say whether learning had taken place. The saying, 'If you don't know where you are going or how you are going to get there, how do you know when you've arrived?' rang very true.

The thinking which resulted from these issues led us to look at models and methods to introduce students and tutors to what we called 'Learn to Learn'. Although there was nothing radically new in 'Learn to Learn', it pulled together pieces of practice which had been happening in an ad hoc way and turned them into a structured framework which introduced students to effective strategies for learning.

Education for coping or for change?

In the study of student drop-out mentioned above, it was the approaches used and the principles held by the tutors which contributed to the withdrawal of students from tuition. A study of the literature on drop out in adult education revealed several pieces of work which were crucial in the development of our thinking.

Peter Jarvis[2] is helpful in distinguishing between two models of education: 'education from above' and 'education of equals'. It is suggested that education from above is a model which demonstrates education as functional to the social system. The type of curriculum suggested by this model is one which enables people to cope or manage better in life situations and initiates individuals into a form and structure of knowledge which is widely accepted. In this model the teacher seeks to control the learning outcomes.

In the education of equals model, however, the emphasis is placed on the individual's ability to achieve his or her potential; the curriculum is selected by the learners in collaboration with the teacher according to interest and relevance; the outcomes are the responsibility of the learner. The education of equals model implies empowerment, the taking of control of learning and the learner accepting responsibility with the tutor for the learning. What, it seemed to us, was happening was that students who were coming to ABE had experience of an education from above model from their previous initial schooling. Their expectations of education and learning were that the tutor had the knowledge and authority and would 'learn' them.

Tutors on the other hand, were working towards an education of equals model where they were encouraging students to set their own goals and take responsibility for their own learning.

It is essential, then, that we are clear about the model of education and the ideology behind that model which informs our practice. Tutors may have been trained to operate certain models or will hold them as part of their own personal beliefs and values, and students will come to tuition with perceptions, beliefs and values which may, or may not concur with those of the tutor.

Two other researchers have particular contributions to make in this field of self concept. Both Boshier[3] and Rubenson[4] believe that motivation in learning is a function between internal psychological factors and external environmental ones. Boshier believes that both participation and drop out can be understood to occur as a function of the size of the discrepancy between the student's self concept and aspects of the educational environment. The congruencies or agreements which he identifies are:

- self/ideal self
- self/other students
- self/teacher
- self/institutional environment.

Boshier suggests that the greater the sum of any incongruencies the greater the likelihood of the student dropping out of tuition.

The expectancy-valence model of Rubenson develops a framework for understanding forces at work which motivate adults to participate in adult education. The expectancy part of the formula consists of two components:

1. expectation of personal success in educational activity
2. expectation that being successful will have positive consequences.

The valence part of the formula is the sum of the values that the individual puts on the different consequences of participation. Thus, motivation to participate is the combined force of positive expectancy and positive valence. Negative expectancy and valence result in non participation, or if previous participation had taken place, withdrawal from participation. It is a complex model which also refers to other factors such as the values of members of reference groups, the individual's current needs and the individual's perception of the environment. Although complex, it puts into perspective the 'external barriers' model which assumes that if access is improved, participation will follow.

The work of Rubenson, Boshier and Jarvis, confirmed what we had been observing for years: that students' self concept, their previous experience of learning, their attitudes and values regarding education and learning, their personal circumstances and their stage in the life cycle will all affect their motivation to participate in new educational experiences. Similarly, the tutor's self concept in the tutor role, her beliefs and values regarding the educational and learning process and her experience within ABE will determine the relationship with the students and the methods used.

ABE in Lothian has a philosophy which is informed by the desire to provide an alternative to institutional education which in the main has failed the students who will be learning within an ABE setting. Tutors are influenced by the principles which underpin ABE philosophy and practice as developed over a decade. These principles include:

- relevant, appropriate curriculum determined by the student in collaboration with the tutor
- acknowledging the student's previous learning and valuing existing experience and knowledge
- acknowledging the barriers to learning and intervening to ameliorate them.

Historically, however, the adult literacy initiative associated adult literacy students with disadvantage, need, lack of confidence and poor self image (Charnley and Jones *Concept of Success*) and has promoted a 'helping people to cope with the demands society makes on them' image. The consequences of this image of ABE students manifests itself in the way some tutors work with students. An empathy with students who have had unsuccessful learning experiences has resulted in some tutors wishing to protect students from further learning failure. Consequently, they have avoided being honest about what is involved in effective learning and the student's responsibility within that process. This unconsciously manifests itself within the student/tutor relationship by:

- encouraging dependence
- allowing students to avoid taking responsibility for their own learning
- protecting students from risk and change and therefore colluding in their 'victim' position.

This education for coping rather than education for change avoids risk taking, prevents a development of critical awareness and avoids the development of structures and frameworks which would give power to the student to take charge of his own learning.

If we have a real commitment to 'education of equals' then this means in addition to adopting a student centred approach to learning which is based on the 'education of equals' philosophy we need to give students the same knowledge base as the tutor about how effective learning takes place. This will ensure that what is entered into is an equal learning partnership where tutor and student have shared responsibilities for the learning.

The learn to learn process

Students who come to ABE have identified the curriculum on offer as being relevant to their needs. The exploration of expectations and learning processes with adults before they are plunged into the ABE curriculum we now consider to be important for two reasons:

1. The approach sets a framework for learning, sets ground rules for the student tutor relationship and clarifies expectations
2. It enables the students to take charge of their learning, values and acknowledges them as partners in a learning relationship, each partner having the same knowledge of how learning takes place.

So, what is this knowledge that we need to share with students? The first thing is a knowledge of the process adults go through when they learn and an exploration of the definition of learning. We also have to allow them to discover that everyone may have different ways of learning within that process.

The model shown below is one we found useful in explaining this:

Motivation is the driving force which pushes the learning wheel from unconscious incompetence to unconscious competence, the completion of each stage reinforcing the motivation. Students must see the value of going on to the next stage or the learning process will break down. The tutor's intervention skills of feedback, explanation, demonstration, evaluation, assessment, goal setting and counselling enable the barriers to learning to be overcome. When the wheel has turned full circle the student is ready to set new learning goals and move on.

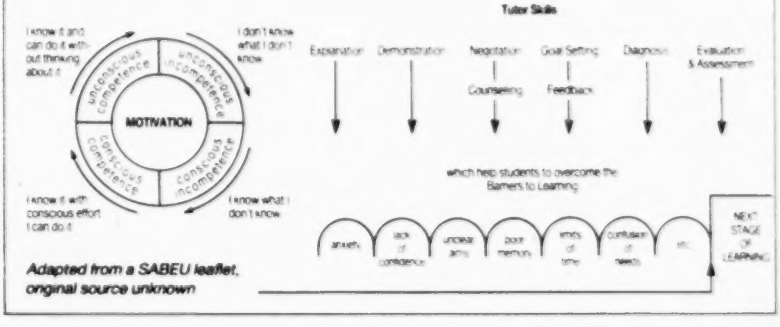
We now consider that the learn to learn programme at the beginning of a period of tution is vital to enable students to reflect on the learning process, experiment with learning strategies, discover what works for them and, therefore, gain confidence that they can be in control of their learning.

Learn to learn is a process. Although it has structure and framework it is organic and flexible. Because it is based on the experiences of the student and the student is the main resource it is also a dynamic process.

Learn to learn course content

This then was our thinking behind setting up a group to pilot a learn to learn course for new students. The group consisted of six students, all of whom identified a need to improve spelling. There were five male students and one female student, the age range of the group being 17-45. The students gave a commitment to attend one

The learning wheel and tutor skills which enable the learning process to move on.



Adapted from a SABEU leaflet, original source unknown

two hour session for six weeks. The course which was negotiated contained the following.

Week 1 **Expectations of the course**

- what do I want from it?
- discussion of previous educational experience
- examination of motivation. Why am I here?
- exploring options
- realistic short term goal setting
- setting ground rules for the course – roles and responsibilities of tutor and student.

Week 2 **Memory**

- short term and long term
- learning by memorising, understanding and doing
- identifying strategies and applying them to specific learning goals
- organisation of learning.

Week 3 **Reading**

- how we do it
- for what purpose?
- what works for me
- speed reading
- strategies for fluency (applying memory strategies from Week 2)
- vocabulary development
- organisation of learning.

Week 4 **Writing**

- how we do it
- for what purpose?
- planning strategies
- drafting and editing
- spelling strategies for remembering (applying memory strategies from Week 2)
- organisation of learning.

Week 5 **Letter writing** – different styles and purposes

- planning strategies
- rough and final copies
- specific spelling strategies
- applying memory strategies from week 2
- organisation of learning.

Week 6 **Evaluation** – purpose of evaluation

- how to evaluate
- what is progress and how is it measured
- keeping learning records for yourself
- where next – future learning goals.

Throughout each session ongoing evaluation took place. Students were encouraged to ask questions such as 'How did I learn that?', 'What worked for me?' 'Why didn't I learn that?'. The next week's session was determined by learning goals set the previous week. Each week the students considered how they would organise their learning. They were given ideas and options so that they could record and check at a future date whether learning had taken place. It was an important feature of the course that preferred learning styles and memory strategies which had been identified were continually reinforced and referred to.

An essential element of the course was the evaluation model used.

At the end of the course the group opted to stay together, and did so for a further six months. One member moved on to college, one to full time employment, another became secretary to a local community group and the others felt they achieved their goals to become more independent at work.

Issues and implications

Students in the group felt in control of their own learning and understood the ways in which they learned. After the course they continued to make demands that tutors acknowledge their learning needs, and enable them to develop strategies to achieve success.

Their confidence increased so quickly that they were tempted to set unrealistic short and long term learning goals.

Consideration needs to be given to the effect that learn to learn courses will have on existing groups. Another pilot course run for existing students resulted in them returning to their groups requiring that their tutors work in this way.

It is labour and cost intensive. Tutors running learning to learn courses need to liaise with voluntary and group tutors who will receive students after the course. The roll on roll off model we operate makes it difficult for group tutors to respond on an individual basis with learn to learn.

If learn to learn courses are a pre-requisite for entry into ABE tuition then all tutors have to be trained in the methods and approaches. This is necessary not only to be able to understand the process that new students joining the group will have been through but also to enable them to introduce existing students to the process.

An important aspect of this course was the ability of the tutor to respond to the individual needs and goals of each student. The preparation factor was very high and worksheets developed for one course could not be used without adaptation for the next. Requests from other tutors for a pack of materials were met with reserve as it was important to acknowledge the adaptation required. The course cannot be delivered through a pack of materials.

The excitement for the student was taking the theory of memory and using their own experiences to translate it into practice.

Conclusions

Because we are convinced that the learn to learn process has encouraged students to take charge of their own learning we are introducing all new students to this course. However, funding and staffing constraints limit the speed at which this can be implemented.

We intend to carefully monitor early drop-outs over the next year to ascertain if participation in the learn to learn course has had a significant effect. Although it is too early yet to accurately assess the drop-out rate the indications are that learn to learn results in clearer goal setting and a critical awareness of the learning process. Ground rules are being established early on in the learning relationship which allows clarity of purpose to be achieved. New students identify a sense of achievement and increased confidence over a short period of time and long stay students are reporting significant changes in their approach to learning.

In the past it has been thought that a learn to learn approach is a useful access to higher and further education. This is evidenced in bridging and study skills courses. Our experience has proved it to be an essential element in introducing students to learning at any level. This approach makes explicit the tutor/student roles and responsibilities, and the values of the tutor and the organisation within which the tutor operates. It does not make assumptions about the student's experience and knowledge base of the learning process. Above all it sets a framework for learning which encourages continual self awareness and evaluation of progress.

Study skills courses are about techniques. Learn to learn is about growth, change and empowerment.

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LITERACY IN BHOPAL

Dr. Neerja Sharma is Assistant Director of the Department of Adult and Continuing Education and the Extension Programme at the University of Bhopal. In this article she describes some of the challenges facing literacy workers in Bhopal.

THE PROGRAMME

At the University level, we have worked in the programme since 1984, in Bhopal and the surrounding areas. Our department has several major activities including:

- running 300 Adult Education Centres to eradicate illiteracy, through the involvement of University and college students in the town districts of Bhopal – 80% of the centres are for women only
- organising training programmes for the functionaries, instructors (tutors), supervisors and programme officers
- adopting the area development approach programme for the welfare of villagers and slum dwellers.

The centres have the job of educating neo-learners for the fifth class examination, as well as giving training in stitching, knitting and sewing. They run on-going programmes for drop outs. In addition they run seven population education clubs, for environmental development, and occasional activities such as fruit preservation, candle making and toy making. Programmes are arranged for unemployed youth which include hand pump repairing and domestic wiring. The University department publishes a quarterly magazine, in Hindi.

The programme aims to educate people of 15–35 years of age who are illiterate and who could not attend school due to circumstances which included poverty, old traditions and beliefs and bad environment. The main aims of the programme are to develop awareness, functional literacy and literacy ability.

PROBLEMS AND INADEQUACIES

We face a number of problems in achieving our goals.

Premises: Our first problem is that we do not have premises where we can organize the centres, and the government does not provide for rent. We have to organise centres in the tutor's or the learner's house, or, sometimes, outside in the open. So it is difficult to organise teaching in the rainy season.

Motivation: Once we have started a centre in a locality, the learners do not participate regularly. They come regularly to begin with, but after a while some leave. Their motivation may not be strong enough and they ask us *"What will we do after we become literate - you are not giving us a job or money."*

Some people are motivated, and would like to attend, but their basic needs prevent them. For example in the slum areas the supply of water is not regular. I was once visiting a centre where all the women were sitting working and then, suddenly, they left. I found out that the water tanker had arrived: it is difficult to ask people to attend a class when they have first to fulfill their basic needs.

Tutors: Our greatest difficulty is to get qualified women instructors, especially in the rural areas. It is also hard in the urban slums because many people are reluctant to go into these areas. We try to appoint people who live in the locality itself.

Working outdoors

Socio-economic status: In poor families all members of the family are in search of daily wages and the older children work with the adults, or take care of the younger children. They then grow up to be illiterate.

Supervision: The functionaries who are directly concerned with the programme are interested in supervisory work, but, due to lack of incentives and motivation, the supervision is not always effective. The main reason for this is the lack of transport.

Incentives: The instructors and the supervisors do not get satisfactory salaries or facilities for their work. Instructors have to spend an hour a day on classes, for very low wages and little social recognition. They are part time workers, and they have to teach at least ten to twenty learners at a time.

Attitudes: The last, but most important point, is people's negative attitude towards education. They think there is no point to education because it does not provide economic status. Girls' education is seen as unimportant because the idea is that girls will marry and therefore money spent on their education is seen as wasted.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Despite all these problems we are getting a 50% to 60% response from our learners. Our greatest achievement is that about 200 students pass the fifth class examination every year. We provide books for these learners by saving money from other items. To encourage learners we have started some sewing and knitting classes alongside our work, and, with the help of the department for the development of children and women, we have opened three or four nursery schools for the learners' children. If the mothers attend the adult education classes,then their children can attend the nursery school.

In order to motivate people we organise different kinds of programmes in their area at the time of national festivals and religious festivals for example Independence Day, International Literacy Day, Republic Day, Women's Day and the birthdays of Gandhi and Nehru.

We also organise some cultural activities and exhibitions, competitions and rallies. Sometimes we distribute prizes, especially to those learners who have passed their fifth class examinations. We ask these learners to talk to people about what they have learned in Adult Education, and how it has benefited them.

For all the problems we are confident that we will achieve our goals, in due time.

Information

Photo: Tony Olliver

Paul Hamlyn, Lady Plowden, Chairman of ALBSU's Co-ordinating Committee for International Literacy Year, and Peter Davis, Chairman, ALBSU Management Committee, at the launch of exhibition materials (funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation) which are being made available to LEAs in England and Wales.

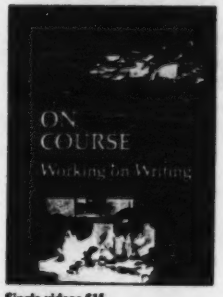
Training Videos: On Course

Five colour videos, for use in Tutor Training, are now available from ALBSU. They can be used as course material for the Initial Certificate in Teaching Basic Communication Skills (ALBSU/City and Guilds 9282).

The *On Course* series consists of:

- **Working on Reading** *(16 mins)*
- **Working on Writing** *(13 mins)*
- **Working with Materials** *(15 mins)*
- **Working on Spelling** *(14 mins)*
- **Working on Assessment** *(13 mins)*

Each video includes information on teaching techniques and approaches, discussion between tutors and students and highlighting of key points.



Single videos £15.
Set of five £70, plus postage:
Single video £1.25. Set of five £2.85

Photo: Mike Harper

Professor Gennady Alekseyvich Yagodin, Chairman USSR State Committee for Public Education, meeting Veronica Hercules Walker (tutor) and Elvis Doisette (student) on a visit to the Kensington and Chelsea Adult Education College's Open Learning Centre, April 1990.

Photo: Tony Olliver

"Literacy is the key to an individual's ability to improve his or her situation and contribute to the well being of society"

H.R.H. the Princess Royal, opening ALBSU's Annual Conference at Glazier's Hall on June 20.

Help your Child with Reading

During Autumn 1990 BBC Education will be transmitting a new television series: *'Help Your Child With Reading'* to coincide with the launch of the third part of International Literacy Year, which will be focussing on parents and children and literacy.

The series aims to persuade parents of the important role they can play in helping their children learn to read.

- to show parents how they can best help and to encourage those who are anxious about their ability to do so. This particularly applies to those who are anxious about their own literacy skills
- to encourage parents to start with babies since talking and listening play an essential part in the early stages of pre-reading
- to give parents some basic information on how reading and writing is taught in schools
- to show how reading together with your child can be fun.

Transmission Times

1 x 10 minute programmes, 6.15pm BBC1 on Sunday 30th September 1990. 7 x 15 minute programmes late evening BBC1 from Monday 8th October 1990. The series will be repeated on Sunday mornings BBC1.

Support

BBC Book: *'Help Your Child With Reading'* by Wendy Body.

Free information pack covering common questions parents ask about reading. Since wishing to help with their child's education often means placing a greater emphasis on their own basic skills, the pack also includes advice for adults who need help with reading. Both available in the autumn.

For further information contact:
Mel Evans, Education Officer,
tel: 081-991 8086.

Wales Conference 1990

The Rt. Hon. David Hunt M.P., Secretary of State for Wales, giving the keynote address at ALBSU's 1990 Wales Conference on Basic Skills, held at Cardiff Castle on May 15.

Photo: Barry Webb

Wordpower

John MacGregor, Secretary of State for Education and Science, presents Jean Clarke with the City and Guilds Certificate in Communications Skills (Wordpower), developed as part of the Basic Skills Accreditation Initiative. The presentation took place at the Department of Education and Science on June 14th 1990. Jean was one of the first six students to be awarded the certificate. She studied for the Stage I certificate at Park Lane College, Leeds while an ET trainee with the Leeds City Council. The other students came from the Coventry Open Learning Centre, Kent Enterprise for Youth Training and Trowbridge Technical College.

Photo: Richard Robbins

BBC Education A Way With Numbers

Two new BBC series transmitted this Autumn focus on numeracy. The first series, **Sum Chance,** consists of eight 10 minute programmes. They have a light-hearted tone and aim to increase everyone's general awareness of maths and to reduce people's anxiety about using numbers.

The second series - **A Way With Numbers** - is made up of twenty 25 minute programmes. These are designed to help people develop numeracy skills. They deal with everyday applications of number for example using money, measurement, weight, volume and time.

Both series are part of the Basic Skills Accreditation Initiative. The teaching content of the second series is linked to numeracy certification.

Transmission times

Sum Chance: BBC1 6.15pm - 6.25pm
14 October - 9 December

A Way With Numbers:
BBC1 11.25am - 11.50am
18 November - 16 December
11.15am - 11.40am and
6 January - 24 April 1991

(Times subject to change - check Radio Times)

Support

BBC Book, **A Way with Numbers** by Terry Riley, available through bookshops.

Crediting Numeracy, a pack to accompany the City and Guilds Numberpower Certificate will be available from ALBSU.

Certification

City and Guilds (3794) - Certificate in Numeracy (Numberpower).

Further information: Pat Hulin, Education Officer: 081 991 8096

TRAINING AND ENTERPRISE COUNCILS AND ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) are being established throughout England and Wales, and most will be fully operational in the next year. As TECs will control most of the funding for vocational training for young people and adults, it is important that they become well informed about the needs of people who want to improve basic skills. In this article Paul Ripley, from the Further Education Staff College (FESC), outlines the role of TECS.

WHAT ARE TECs?

TECs are a direct response to the poor levels of training in the United Kingdom. This phenomena is highlighted by the demographic trends which show a marked decline in the labour force of young people and a similar decline in the national labour force as a whole. As a consequence, industry and commerce have to face a shortage of a well trained and well motivated workforce to meet the challenges of the 1990's and especially the single European market.

It is being attempted to stimulate the economy and improve the ability of its workforce with a variety of initiatives. Women, ethnic minorities, the long-term unemployed and other marginalised groups, are being encouraged to retrain or join in industrial regeneration through becoming active participants of the economy. These groups however, will only be effective if they have the skills and are trained to meet the needs of the economy.

TECs have been given the specific responsiblity to set up, under local industrial leadership, developments which will reflect:

- a remit for training and enterprise
- long term objectives, not a quick fix solution
- national goals, but delivered locally
- training aims which transcend traditional diversions
- accountable targets, the reputation of TEC Directors being put on the line

  and
- responsibility for a move from supply-led to a demand-led training system.

The schedule for setting up the TEC system aimed at having 12-15 TECs in development by December 1989, but in fact development funding had been approved for 51 TECs by early 1990, and in July 1990 the first 13 TECs are fully operational.

The embryo TECs are getting organised, setting up their sub-structures and working parties, which will generally be chaired by a TEC Director. Specialists will, however, also be involved so that each TEC Board becomes aware of, and can take advice from, all sectors of the community. TECs are undertaking market research and needs analysis, and are seeking the support of the community to ensure they have credibility.

THE PARTNERSHIP ROLE

The TEC forms a public/private partnership involving Government, business and voluntary organisations which share the risks, resources and benefits in a way which:

- makes effective use of limited resources

  and
- produces benefits neither partner could produce alone.

For partnership to work, there does not need to be exact parity of numbers, but there must be a close match between the interests, skills and resources that each partner can contribute, and those needed to effectively solve potential problems.

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION

The emergence of TECs as the main drivers of training poses a wide variety of challenges and problems for education as a whole not just for one particular sector. Looking at localised provisions, it is possible to see how almost from the cradle to the grave, TECs and Local Authorities should be able to work co-operatively together towards the aims of industrial and community regeneration. They need to undertake this co-operation if the economy is to benefit from those previously marginalised groups.

TRAINING RESOURCES

TECs will be given responsibility for developing schemes currently managed by the Training Agency such as Employment Training, Youth Training and Business Growth Training. In addition, each TEC will have access to a Local Initiative Fund (LIF). The degree to which the TEC and its partners use the LIF to attract further funds will, to a large degree, be the factor which most affects the success of the enterprise.

The TEC system will represent a transfer of £3 billion from central to local control. Following efforts by TEC Chairs to win more financial freedom, recent changes in regulations have allowed TECs greater flexibility in the financial control of their programmes.

RATIONALE

There were three main reasons behind the TEC initiative:

- the UK industrial investment record, with 17 per cent in plant, but only eight per cent in training

- demography: numbers of potential employees in the 16-19 age group are falling, while those in the 25-54 age group are increasing. Thus there will be a limitation on traditional recruits, and increased retraining and updating will be essential
- the need to respond to '1992'.

TECs will need to concentrate on relationships, meeting people's needs in a way that is relevant, offers quality and delivers appropriate outcomes. They must also answer the question "Who has the real choice?" and work to ensure 'equality of provision'.

TECs AND THE EDUCATION SERVICE

Child Care Facilities

The TECs, having been given a very wide brief, may well speculate that there is a need for them to be involved in education even down to this level. There appears to be an inescapable logic that an employer who is hoping to attract women into the economy, must provide them with the facilities which they need to enable them to be active participants. TECs will possibly use funds from the Local Initiative Fund, recently further added to by the Employment Secretary, to develop such facilities as crèches and child care facilities for working mothers. It would be reasonable if Local Authorities take:

- Cognisance of their own provision
- Examine the possibilities of joint provision funded through LIF.

COLLEGES OF FURTHER EDUCATION

The Education Reform Act

The Education Reform Act may be used as a tool examining and developing structures in colleges and giving them the ability to restructure and bring in processes which will aid the development of partnerships. Colleges should examine their own strategic plans in conjunction with TECs and Local Authority planning to ensure that they have a harmony rather than a mismatch in perceptions as to where the College should be developing. As such, colleges need to look upon developing a culture of:

- Community involvement
- Pro-active marketing
- Constant review

Community Involvement

Many colleges will consider that they are already closely involved in all aspects of community life. Many however, should carefully examine the indicators of changing perspective such as:

- quality of development plan
- development of new work
- achievement of aims
- attraction of new clients/target groups
- achievement of research objectives
- participation in determining change
- amount of income generated

and relate these to the benefits the college offers to the locality in terms of social and business development. It is not sufficient to use indicators of a purely quantitative nature to justify the extension, closure or development of courses and their relationships to the community.

These are of course vital, but must be used in conjunction with indicators of a qualitative nature.

If colleges are not meeting the quality measures by provision of curriculum which is not the most suitable to the community's needs, the Reform Act gives Governors and Principals the ability to react in a more responsive nature than previously, taking the necessary remedial action to ensure that courses do meet the wider needs of the whole community, both economic and social.

THE SPECIFIC ROLE OF ABE

TECs will be committed to regular retraining. It is essential they do this if people are to achieve their potential and stay abreast of changes in the economy, technology and employment trends. TECs will be giving individuals and groups greater responsibility in defining and achieving their learning objectives. TECs will be developing a number of criteria:

- identifying specifically local issues relating to training and enterprise
- a commitment to the development and provision to meet specific needs of the black and minority ethnic communities including ESOL provision
- recognition of the importance of women returners in the context of the demographic drop and a commitment to training which seeks to avoid stereo type roles
- prioritisation of the development of a network of high quality employment, careers and training guidance for both employed and unemployed personnel
- identifying current and future skill shortages and developing training programmes to meet the needs of the unemployed, local industry and those with special needs
- establishing measures in respect of quality control and assurances which can assist with the raising of standards in education, training and employment.

As such, TECs will be relying upon local knowledge and expertise to help them develop these criteria. The role of the local authority Adult Basic Education Service will become paramount in helping in the development of both ESOL and ABE.

HOW TO CONNECT WITH TECs

TECs will be driven by business principles and not by the bureaucratic principles which have previously driven local education authorities. TECs are likely to be involved in the development of partnerships, training and enterprise orientated and quite concise. Managers in basic education should ensure that they respond in a pro-active fashion to the TECs requirements. They should draw together a clear and well presented prospectus of what they can offer the TECs in terms of training and retraining through basic skills provision. This prospectus should be no longer than one side of A4 paper. It should contain information on what local provision is available, how it can respond and how TECs can contact local providers. The organiser for basic education in the Borough or Local Authority should contact local TECs and submit a copy of the prospectus. Members of TEC Boards should be invited to see what provision is available locally and how they themselves can enhance provision.

Where possible, College Governors when basic education comes under the College wing, should be made aware of this particular part of the curriculum and be invited, if they have a dual function, to operate on both a TEC Board and the Governing Body to further basic skills interests at their sub-committees of the TECs.

If colleagues are not able to contact their local TEC directly, they are advised to get in touch with the Training Agency at Moorfoot, Sheffield S1 4PQ, who will provide them with a directory of TECs within their area.

> *"A declaration, in the Corporate Plan, of the importance of basic skills, with no indication of how needs are to be met, is not acceptable."*
>
> Sir Brian Wolfson: Chairman National Training Task Force

ENGLISH FOR SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

Mixed Ability Groups

The planning team for a training event in the West Midlands, Rama Joshi and Rani Banga from Birmingham, Carolyn Wiggins and Tricia Cavalot from Walsall, outline practical ideas for mixed ability teaching.

INTRODUCTION

At an ALBSU Regional Training event held in March on the topic of teaching ESOL Mixed Ability Groups it was discovered that new tutors and frequently very experienced tutors find great difficulty in coping with groups of mixed abilities. Tutors sometimes feel that they are not meeting the needs of all their students all the time and this leads to feelings of frustration, exhaustion and inadequacy. At the training event we tried to work out strategies which would help tutors to enable each individual student to reach his or her own maximum potential.

We soon discovered that it would be impossible and impractical to solve all the problems, but some of the ideas which came out of the day might help other tutors to feel they are able to provide an improved service.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

Here are a few ideas which have been applied by experienced tutors to help cater for individual levels of ability and motivations within a group. Sometimes we work with all the students together to foster a group atmosphere, sometimes we encourage students to work alone, in pairs or in smaller groups.

Live Aid. The Day.

July 13th 1985 was a beautiful morning. *More than 85% of the world's television sets including those in the Soviet Union would be switched on for Live Aid:* two billion people would be watching. It was to be the biggest concert the world had ever known. According to *Time Magazine* the twin concerts cost about $4 million and that was without the free services and all the bands playing free. $7 million would come in from ticket sales alone and another $7 million from broadcasting and TV rights. The day was already

this day, had agonising back pain. He had lain awake into the small hours, his mind going over and over the thousand things that could go wrong. Now he was on his way to Wembley.

The crowds were already streaming into the arena; those who spotted him arriving called out to wish him good luck. The doubts of the night were vanishing in the mounting anticipation. Even before the first note of music, there was excitement in the air, a feeling that everyone was in this thing together.

Backstage everything seemed chaotic. Bob told himself that this was just an illusion – that everyone knew exactly what they were doing. At least he hoped so. Some of the crew hadn't slept for the last two days, there had been so much to

BOB GELDOF .

Can you make questions for the following answers ?

1 . More than 85% .

2 . They were going to perform the biggest concert ever known .

3 . Fourteen million dollars .

4 . Four million dollars .

5 . They hadn't slept for the last two

6 . Because there had been so much to

BOB GELDOF .

Bob Geldof was born on October 5th 1954 in Dublin, Ireland. His grandfather was a Belgian sailor who emigrated to Ireland . His mother died when he was young and he was brought up by his older sister .

He went to a Catholic school called Blackrock College and after jobs as a lorry driver , English teacher , and factory worker he moved to Canada where he worked on a pop music newspaper .

In 1975 he returned to Dublin wanting to start his own free newspaper . He joined some old school friends who were forming a rock group called THE BOOMTOWN RATS .

Using newspaper articles

All the suggested techniques below are interlinked:

1. Group work using a common topic with graded activities

a) A listening exercise

All the students listen to the same item, but comprehension questions are graded in complexity to suit each student's ability. Beginners can just listen for *key words*.

b) Dialogues

Two or three sample dialogues are recorded, using the same theme, but becoming progressively more complex.

c) Role Play

Can be used as a "whole group" activity, the context being very simple for beginners and becoming progressively more complex and unpredictable for the higher ability levels. Advanced students can also sometimes play the roles of "officials" or the public in role play situations.

d) Reading

Some readers are available in simple and advanced form on the same topic, enabling students at different levels to read about the same topic.

Newspaper Articles can be selected on a common topic and modified to suit all levels.

e.g. Advanced – use the article as it is
Intermediate – shorten or enlarge the article.
Beginners – find key words from flash cards.

e) Writing

A large number of graded worksheets should be available from ESOL Centres. Activities such as *Letter Writing* can be simple or complex to suit all ability levels, e.g. "Chalo Kaam Kare" has a good section on letter writing.

f) Language games

Variations of the same game, e.g. Bingo, Pelmanism, Kim's game, can be adapted to suit all levels. The same game could be used in small groups adapted according to ability.

"Talkback" story sequences and graded worksheets. These packs from Coventry, covering 20 everyday topics, contain a story sequence, sentence strips and four graded worksheets. They develop the four communication skills and enable students to work on a common topic – as a group for listening and speaking, and individually with the literacy worksheets.

2. Dividing class into two or more activity groups

Each group works independently and could be selected according to either:

a) level of ability, or

b) common motivation.

The groups could be working on completely separate activities:

e.g. Group A – Letter writing using a workpack.
Group B – Telephone dialogue using a cassette.
Group C – Reading/copying names and addresses from wordcards.

This method necessitates a great deal of preparation by the tutor who must have everything ready for the groups to work on their own. The tutor will need to explain to each group how to proceed and make sure that the other groups are occupied when they have not got the tutor's direct attention. The tutor will then need to move from group to group making sure that all is running smoothly.

3. Open Learning Self-Access Resources

Open Learning in this case refers to students being able to choose their own materials and then working independently with occasional help and guidance from the tutor. All the following activities could be graded to suit beginner, intermediate and advanced students in oral English and literacy.

Possible Self-Access Activities

a) Students select suitable materials from a wide range on display.

b) Resources, e.g. forms, are displayed in a wide range of levels and topics.

c) *Simple comprehension exercises* with cassettes are made available, graded in complexity.

d) *Graded sentence building exercises:*

e.g. Beginners – "Jigsaw Puzzle" sentences
Intermediate – matching beginning/end of sentences
Advanced – sentence completion exercises.

e) *Use of cassettes* for listening/reading activities using graded reading materials to suit each student's level of ability.

f) *Keeping a Diary* during the week between lessons. All levels can be catered for as students write as much or as little as they are able. Beginners can write or copy key words only. Intermediate/Advanced can write as much as they can in note form.

Students can write about their activities during the week, e.g. a report of a specified TV programme.

g) *Project work* presented in a file. e.g. TV films, current affairs, news from India, Royal Family, etc.

Beginners could simply collect pictures and maybe label them.

h) *Home study materials* a limited series is available from Walsall and Nuneaton ESOL Centres, and others are being prepared. Each pack contains a bilingual workbook and cassette with translated instructions to enable the student to work alone with occasional checking and guidance from the tutor.

4. Use of Hardware

e.g. cassette recorders, head phones, videos, language master – to facilitate the use of individual, pair or small group techniques outlined above.

5. Help from Volunteer Tutors

To work within small groups or with individual students. The class tutor usually plans and prepares the work and should explain the objectives clearly to the volunteer. The class tutor should also remain responsible for student assessment and all record keeping.

6. Referring on

Students whose level of ability or motivation is widely different from that of the rest of the class can be counselled and referred on to more appropriate provision. We feel that this is *essential* and it is *not* good practice to keep a student in a class where his/her needs cannot be adequately catered for.

GENERAL SUGGESTIONS

1. It might be useful to establish a pattern for lessons. e.g.
Whole group discussion ——▶ small group activities ——▶ whole group game.
2. It might be appropriate to rotate the use of the hardware and/or volunteer tutors around the small groups.
3. Tutors should carry a *Survival Kit* (stored in classroom, capacious bag or car) which contains a very wide range of resources at different levels and about different topics to cater for any unexpected student or spontaneous request.

   Your *Survival Kit* should also contain some games or other general activities which can be instantly produced should your prepared lesson become inappropriate.
4. Care must be taken when preparing or selecting materials to choose a size and layout appropriate to the student's level. Beginner students need large size materials with a very open layout which can gradually be reduced until authentic size and layout is appropriate.

All in all, we conclude that PREPARATION is the key to a happy class!

You Can Help with Reading ... an Open Learning Pack for YTS ET Trainers. An introduction to helping trainees develop reading skills

by Bethan Wareing, Janet Toye, Moira Turner of Orton Associates

Published by West Wales Accredited Centre, Gors Avenue, Cockett, Swansea SA1 6SF

Price: £15.00 inc. p+p

The pack is a spiral bound A4 book, 104pp and is intended for those trainers with 'no prior study of the teaching of reading' and is presumably designed for those trainers who do not have the opportunity to attend an introductory training course.

There is little to take exception with in the book. The theory is sound and the examples are, welcomingly, occupationally related. There are sections on the nature of literacy, the learner, language experience, cloze procedure, miscue analysis, silent reading, phonics, simplification, record keeping . . . The list seems endless, and this is my major misgiving. Given the paucity of text on each page the authors have set themselves – and the trainer who studies from it – a massive task.

In my experience many trainers will find the pace of learning too rushed. Concepts are introduced, briefly developed and then left. We, rightly, talk in education and training of starting where the learner is. That approach is not always borne out in this book. For instance, when dealing with memory, trainers are invited to memorise some symbols and then asked to analyse what they have learnt about short and long term memory without explanation of these terms. In general, there is not enough explanation following activities in order for the less experienced trainer to gain understanding of the points being made.

Although each section is followed by a list of further reading, the books quoted (many, incidentally, now out of print) are texts at a much higher level – university publications and the like.

However, I did like the appendix – work developed with a group of trainees interested in gardening. The authors obviously know not just the theory but how to apply it in practice.

Sadly, the physical limits of the book have not allowed sufficient space to develop their ideas to do full justice to their expertise.

Given the frameworks of staff training which are being developed in both the training and education sectors of basic skills it seems difficult to place this text as a key document. I really don't feel reading this book would be a replacement for a trainer actively taking part in a training course.

Finally, Writing: (this brief comment has more words than the authors have on this subject). I really don't think writing can be relegated to simply a "Postscript; reading and writing re-inforce each other." They are different activities. Books can be written on how they differ but oops! . . . I've already used more words than here are devoted to writing.

Terry Riley
Training Consultant

Making Connections

Edited by Ann Brechin and Jan Walmsley

Published by Hodder and Stoughton

Price: £4.95

ISBN 0 340 51328 4

Many adult education tutors are concerned about the integration of students with learning difficulties into their classes – expecially those teaching in the area of literacy and basic skills. Often tutors' only experience of this group is in class. *Making Connections* is essential reading for tutors who are interested in understanding some of the wider issues affecting the lives of these students.

The book is a collection of articles ranging from personal experience to research papers. Much of it is challenging. In particular the short chapter describing the perspective and experience of an art tutor makes some strong points about normal-isation and the chapters on community care deal with a number of important current issues. The study of the adult status of people with a mental handicap concludes that society has a problem conceding their adulthood (and therefore equal status) and that "to be an adult one must first be seen to be fully human".

This book is not intended to help with classroom practice, but anyone interested in this area will find that it is thought-provoking and stimulating. It should influence both their work and their perceptions of people with learning difficulties.

Sue Lawley
Project Co-ordinator
Paddington Integration Project

Microcomputer Review

North Shropshire Easy Access Pack

by 'Second Chance', Oswestry College

Available from: Albert Road Centre, Oswestry College, Albert Road, Oswestry SY11 1NH

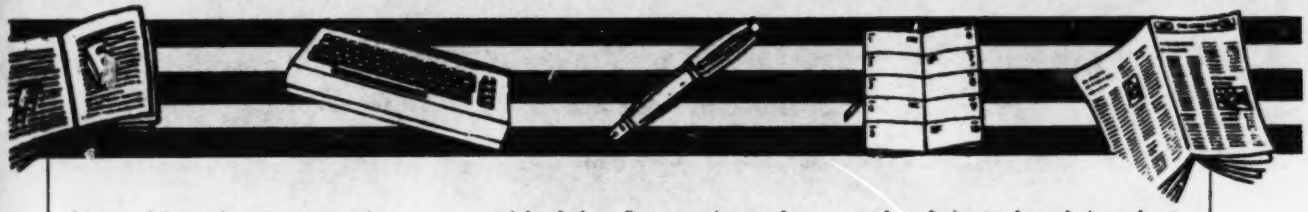
Price: £400.00 inc. p +p

As assistant manager of North Shropshire Training I am always looking at ways to encourage and help the acquisition of basic skills for our premium YTS trainees. My association with 'Second Chance', the Adult Basic Education scheme in North Shropshire enabled me to see the value and contribution that a well organised, computer-assisted learning pack, can make towards supporting basic literacy/numeracy skills. I became so convinced that I ordered some packs for our YTS workshops in North Shropshire, so there would be some continuity and reinforcement in our trainees' learning programmes.

"The Easy Access Pack" as it is called, is conveniently presented in an easel-type A4 folder with sturdy frames holding 30 floppy 5¼" discs containing approximately 200 programs.

There is a literacy chart and a numeracy chart which are divided into 3 levels of difficulty (i) easy, (ii) more difficult, (iii) advanced. The charts are further divided into skill areas, e.g. spelling, comprehension, writing, problem solving, money, time, the four rules of number, metric measurement, etc. Each program in the pack is named and placed in the appropriate position on their chart with the number of the disc it is on clearly shown alongside. The selection of a program on the right subject and at the appropriate level of difficulty takes less than a minute.

This is not all however. When you reach into the pack for the chosen disc, you find more detailed information about its content with small



hints and tips on how to use certain programs. To further reinforce the student's learning many of the discs have freely copiable worksheets accompanying them. Many of the worksheets have been devised by 'Second Chance' experienced ABE practitioners.

In these days when words such as Open and Flexible Learning; self accessing; independent learning skills etc., are much in evidence, the "Easy Access Pack" complements these ideas and is a fine example of how to make computer assisted learning in literacy and numeracy skills a truly student-centred learning experience. A must for any establishment which is working with people who have a wide range and diversity of needs in basic literacy/numeracy skills. By the way – it's fun too!

Tony Allman
Assistant Manager
North Shropshire Training

Supporting Literacy Through Wordprocessing

by Jacquetta Megarry and Eric Deeson

Published by Special Needs Software Limited, 74 Victoria Crescent Road, Glasgow G12 9JN

Price: Standard Pack £29.00 + VAT
Pack + Wordwise Plus Chip £49.00

To use these materials you will need access to a BBC Model B, B+ or Master computer fitted with a Wordwise Plus chip. This may be your first problem! If you don't have a machine already fitted with this chip you will need to buy the more expensive version of the package, complete with the Wordwise Plus chip. Once you have got it, fitting the chip to your machine is a job for someone with experience. A further complication is that the software works only with Wordwise Plus, not plain Wordwise which some schemes have access to.

And you're not out of the wood yet. The tutor's booklet which accompanies the pack is (depending on your prior knowledge of wordprocessing) at best confusing or at worst incomprehensible. Although the pack is supposed to be usable by people with "no experience of computers or wordprocessing" I am certainly glad my first experience of these skills wasn't gained through using this pack. It would have done nothing but confuse me.

The rest of the pack consists of five discs containing cloze exercises, splitting longer words, writing letters, jumbled sentences and texts. In themselves these may be of some use to some students and copies into paper can be made. There is a lot of material here, but my main complaint is that there has been no attempt made to make these materials accessible to basic education students. The written instructions are all printed in very small, tightly packed print. Most students and tutors (including this one) would spend a great deal of time trying to get the thing started in the first place.

Melvyn Smith
Project Development Worker,
Baselines ABE Project, Milton Keynes Bucks

Breaking the Barriers

by Wendy Moss

Published by ALFA, The North London Open College Network, The Marlborough Building, 383 Holloway Road, London N7 0RN, funded by REPLAN.

Price £3.50

ISBN 0 951 309 9

This is an excellent and accessible account of the experiences of Women Returning to Learning in North London. Wendy Moss effectively used eight case studies of black and white working class women to examine and illustrate the sexism and classism which the women encountered in their struggle to achieve and make sense of the education system.

Breaking the Barriers illustrates the need for educators to take account of the internalised lack of confidence and self worth which women often feel – the result of early mis-treatment at school. The book contrasts the empowering effects for these women of the student-centred, whole person approach of the Fresh Start courses with the effects of the more formal and rigid provision which characterised the FE and HE institutions and courses they became involved with.

The women were interviewed regularly and followed through their individual passages from uncertainty and confusion to clear choices about adult education classes, FE colleges and polytechnics. We are given an account, often in their own words, of their triumphs, struggles and occasional failure.

The women's own understanding of their experiences are perceptive, intelligent and to the point. Their needs are clearly identified.

The individual and collective experiences are elegantly related, by the author, to the institutional practices, assumptions and attitudes which prevent mature women, who have previously been excluded from educational opportunities, finding access the easy and welcoming experience educators would wish it to be. The analysis of the eight case studies lends weight and authority to the recommendations which follow, recommendations which, if practised, will help to redress the inequalities of outcomes for many women returners.

Adult educationalists wishing to attract and support women returners will find this report useful, enlightening and challenging.

Julia Raffo
ABE Area Co-Ordinator,
Somerset Education Authority

Using Your Library

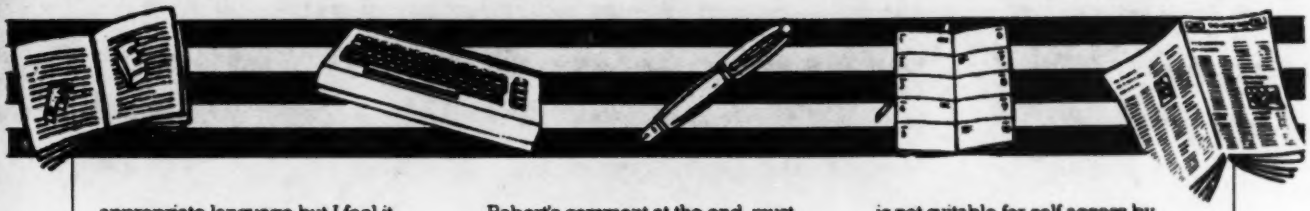
by Leicestershire Adult Basic Education Service and Leicestershire Libraries and Information Service

Published by Leicestershire County Council Publication, Leicestershire Libraries and Information Service, 1st Floor, Thames Tower, Navigation Street, Leicestershire LE1 3TZ and Leicestershire Adult Basic Education Service, Room 400, County Hall, Glenfield, Leicester.

Price: 99p

As a tutor in an Open Learning Centre based in a library I was very interested in this book. It is well written, attractively presented and covers all the things a newcomer to a public library would need to know including what to do if your dog does something nasty to a library book.

Some of the language is rather difficult in view of the fact that it is written for A.B.E. students. However, I do like the way 'special library words' are introduced with an explanation of their meaning. It is important to extend the students' vocabulary with



appropriate language but I feel it would need tutor support to help students read and understand this material.

I think it is a useful model which could be adopted by other local authorities to encourage wider use of the libraries as well as providing supplementary reading material for ABE centres. Owing to the number of references to Leicestershire I do not think it could be used outside that area in its present format.

Helen Papworth
Tutor
Rhyl Second Chance Centre
Clwyd Local Education Authority

A Word in Your Ear

by Sam McAughtry and Albert Crawford

Published by BBC N.I. Education in collaboration with Adult Literacy and Basic Reading Skills Education Committee and sponsored by W & G Baird Ltd.

Price: Free – postage of 34p a copy would be appreciated. Phone orders only. Tel: 0232 322488

"A Word in Your Ear", is a compilation of memoirs from two authors. The first half of the book is devoted to the memoirs of Sam McAughtry and is entitled *A Belfast Boyhood and Hard Times*. Although written in eight chapters, each chapter stands alone as a story in its own right and each chapter is an ideal length for the beginner reader. In this story his descriptions of social conditions in a deprived area during the 1920's are vivid and yet the humour of the time is not lost in his descriptive writing.

In the second half of the book, the co-author, Albert Crawford, gives his memoirs in eight short stories. Again set in the 20's and 30's the reader is transported back in time. As before, humour, the very essence of survival in those hard times is captured and set to print. For any teacher, of any age, the last pen picture of the H.M.I.'s visit and Robert's comment at the end, must stand as a classic.

Throughout the book, photographs taken at the time provide the reader with visual clues of the era.

This book should be on the shelves of every institution concerned with the teaching of basic skills. Written in an easily readable form the book will appeal to readers of all ages and varying abilities. The only problem I would foresee for the students is that once the tutors discover this book, then the students will have to wait.

Len Power
Community Education Officer
ABE Co-ordinator
South Tyneside Education Authority

Stop Press

by Jan Hully and David Mastin

Published by Macmillan

Price: £39.50

ISBN 0 333 51398 3

Stop Press is an attractively produced ring binder. In four units it aims to acquaint students with every aspect of the newspaper from its production to the horoscope column!

The reading level of the worksheets is, on the whole high, therefore the students' skill development must be assessed carefully before using the material. Not all of the worksheets were easy to simplify in our experience. The authors do suggest adapting the work for special needs students – we found the work involved in this negated the value of the pack entirely.

Being easily photocopiable this pack offers a useful resource for work on newspapers within a higher level group, although as is recommended by the authors, local newspapers would have more relevance than the *Sheffield Star* used throughout.

As the pack is heavy on tutor notes it is not suitable for self access by students. A good 'ideas' pack, a pity it has to be so limited within the ABE population.

Cathy Diggle,
(helped by students & support tutors)
Tutor Organiser, CABE "Link into Learning"
Cornwall Education Authority

A-Z of Herbal Medicines

Published by Blackfriars Literacy Scheme, Southwark and Walk-In Numeracy, Hammersmith, 44-47 Nelson Square, London SE1 0QA

Price: £1.75 inc. p+p

It's refreshing to read a book by and for ABE students which is on a subject not usually covered in the publications available to us. This book could prove literally refreshing, too, since it includes many recommendations on the use of herbal teas.

The authors have drawn together from their own experience traditional remedies from all over the world and have added some notes on various forms of alternative medicine. The information, which makes fascinating reading, has been arranged in an A-Z form. This becomes a little bit contrived when it comes to the last few letters of the alphabet, but this is a minor criticism.

The book is generally easy to read, though some of the names of ailments and herbs might be unfamiliar. It is well laid out with good, simple drawings and decorated pages. It is interesting enough to be used by people at any stage of reading and should start some lively discussions about other remedies and alternative medicine in general. Altogether, a very enjoyable book which I have no hesitation in recommending to others.

Linda Lever
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Liverpool Education Authority

The ALBSU Newsletter is published four times a year, in November, February, May and July. Copies are available, free, to organisations and individuals. We aim to publish articles of interest to those teaching in adult literacy, second language and basic skills, those who are responsible for funding and organising the provision, and those who are generally interested in these important areas of work.

If you have ideas on topics which you would like to see covered, please contact the Editor, at ALBSU. Reviews of relevant publications are written for the newsletter by practitioners, and we are interested to receive publications which could be useful in basic education.

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Adult Literacy & Basic Skills Unit

NEWSLETTER

Photo: Peter Ward

The alpha flexible learning centre, Manchester.
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EXPANDING PROVISION – IMPROVING PRACTICE

'Reading Standards decline' appears to have been the favourite headline of many a newspaper sub-editor in the last few months. Survey after survey has appeared to indicate that more children are poorer readers today then they were in the past and blame has been heaped on teaching methods, notably the 'real books' approach or on large classes and an underfunded education system. What does it mean to those of us working in basic education?

Basic skills is a recurrent area of debate. Recent publicity has concentrated on the seeming decline in reading standards amongst seven year olds and the letters pages of many national newspapers have devoted considerable space to different views about the teaching of reading. The debate has concentrated on whether some approaches are more effective than others and often the suggestion has been that people have always been highly literate until recent years. A similar debate has also been taking place about other basic skills, such as basic maths. The 1970s always seems to be the prime candidate for blame.

No parent or teacher should, of course, be happy with an education system which results in a substantial minority of young people leaving school with relatively poor standards of literacy and numeracy. Not because it is not possible to improve reading and writing skills as an adult, but because it is much more difficult and takes much more effort. Furthermore, having paid for education for our children through taxation, it really is not good enough if the system has failed to teach these essential basic skills successfully.

A RECENT PROBLEM?

Anyone working in basic skills programmes knows that this is not just a recent problem, even if it is rather more in the news at present. Literacy and numeracy students are of all ages and many were taught through so called structured, phonic approaches in the 1950s and 1960s. Furthermore, many basic skills students who are seeking help with spelling appear to have sufferred from over reliance on phonics. Often such students spell perfectly well phonetically; it's just unfortunate that the English language is rather irregular and phonetically based spelling is often incorrect spelling. Recent evidence about the basic numeracy skills of adults indicates that while many young people have difficulties with basic maths rather more problems are evident among the over 45 age group – a group educated in the 1950s and 1960s before so called 'modern methods' were in use in schools.

Much time and energy is wasted on the debate about whether standards are better or worse than they were in the past. Changing demands, and the difficulty of ensuring that tests are valid over a period of years, mean that the question of rising or falling standards can never be answered entirely satisfactorily. The most important question is whether standards of literacy and numeracy are good enough for a highly industrialised country in the 1990s. Certainly it seems that few people believe that current standards of basic skills are good enough.

The most important question is whether standards of literacy and numeracy are good enough for a highly industrialised country in the 1990s.

'REAL BOOKS' OR PHONICS?

Most people working with adults who have been failed by the education system are wary of a single 'magic' approach to teaching basic skills. Phonic based approaches work very well with some people, while approaches based on visual memory work with other people. Certainly reading, writing and spelling skills need to be taught; rarely are they learnt by most children incidentally. Nor is all learning likely to be enjoyable. Much learning is relatively boring and tedious and it is foolhardy to lead learners of any age to believe that all learning will be fun. Often we learn without totally realising the benefit it will bring (how enjoyable is learning tables?) and only later recognise how useful certain skills will be.

It may be difficult to admit but it is likely that some people will leave school without adequate standards in basic skills in the future, as in the past. (Blaming the National Curriculum may be the fashion in twenty years time!). To admit this probability is not to accept poor standards

of schooling but to acknowledge reality. Changing literacy and numeracy demands are likely to be every bit as important as the standard of basic skills children leave school with. In almost every other industrialised country – whatever the methods of teaching, whatever the education system – it is a stark reality that a minority of children leave school without adequate standards of literacy and numeracy. So basic skills provision for young people and adults is likely to be necessary for the forseeable future. What 'shape' this provision takes in the future is also the subject of some debate.

THE NEW 'CONTRACTORS'

Although recent changes in legislation, particularly the Education Reform Act, do not mention basic education, changes in the role of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) as the main providers of education are likely to affect basic skills work. LEAs are likely to be less concerned as 'providers' in the next few years as greater autonomy passes to schools and colleges through LMS and LMC. (Local Management of Schools and Local Management of Colleges). Rather, LEAs will be centrally concerned with planning, funding and ensuring that quality standards exist throughout the education system.

As far as education is conerned LEAs are likely to adopt a changed role from the position which existed a decade ago when they were the major providers of learning opportunities. A diversity of providers now exists. Increasingly authorities will be in the role of a major 'contractor' of basic education. This is no less important a role and, along the with Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs), LEAs will be the major bodies responsible for ensuring that quality standards are maintained and improved in the next few years. Coherence will be the 'watchword' in order to ensure that potential students are aware of what is on offer and to avoid unnecessary duplication and competition between different providers.

Basic skills – an essential rather than a desirable area of education and training – is too important to be left to 'market forces'.

In too many authorities competition between adult education, further education, training managers, community schools etc., means that a lot of effort is expended to attract relatively few students rather than working together in a planning framework to ensure that high quality basic education and training is available to as many people as might benefit from it. Basic skills – an essential rather than a desirable area of education and training – is too important to be left to 'market forces' and undue competition is likely to be wasteful rather than leading to increased efficiency.

Undoubtedly future funding will be increasingly linked to entitlement, progress rates, outcomes and the number of adults benefiting from learning opportunities. This will emphasise the need for improved planning, better targeting and an increased scale of basic skills provision. Much of this will need increased funding. However, funding will not be made available merely for more of the same, or for unspecified programmes. We will not escape from an assessment of the effectiveness of basic skills work. This need not, however, be threatening particularly if we have the information available to demonstrate that provision is effective in allowing people to improve their basic communication and numerical skills. Low drop-out because of dissatisfaction, regular attendance, monitored progress and progression for those students who want to 'move on' will all be seen as indicators of a high quality basic education service and will continue to gain support locally and nationally.

Funding does have a bearing on the effectiveness of basic skills work. The level of funding currently available means that the service available is unduly limited and relies rather too much on the goodwill of poorly rewarded staff and willing volunteers. (ALBSU's most recent estimate indicates that only about £30 million is spent on basic education per annum). This will not do in the 1990s; it will not answer the needs of either the individuals concerned or the needs of industry. We remain an underskilled and undereducated nation and our performance economically will not improve significantly unless we are prepared to invest in basic education and training.

IMPROVING PRACTICE

Funding is not everything, however. The 1990s will need not only improvements in funding but, just as importantly, improvements in practice. Better induction, including more effective advice and guidance, will need to be introduced in order to make sure that people get effective and appropriate tuition. Too often basic education is a 'catch all' and is seen as an entry point to post school education for non-traditional audiences. The 'open door' which leads to an educational 'cul de sac' is neither efficient or effective.

Rather more emphasis will need to be given to developing 'learning plans' with students, defining the basic skills curriculum, ensuring that progress is regularly assessed, enabling students to be accredited for skills learnt and making sure that progression routes exist for people who want to 'move on'. Although there has been a great deal of emphasis on the variety of needs in basic education, we have often fallen into the trap of treating all students in the same way. Choice has often been limited to one small group or another, whether you want to attend on a Tuesday evening or on a Thursday, in one run down centre or another. The welcome choice which has been introduced through the establishment of open learning centres will need to be extended, not least because, for the first time in many areas students can learn in well decorated surroundings, with high quality learning material, really new technology and at a pace and time that suits them.

For the first time in many areas, students can learn in well decorated surroundings, with high quality learning material, really new technology and at a pace and time that suits them.

It's only an educated guess but the 'universal good' attached to staff training is also likely to be the subject of some fairly rigorous questioning in the next few years. The link between the level of investment in staff development and training and the quality of the teaching offered to basic skills students often seems unclear. Although staff training is often said to be a crucial factor in high quality teaching, it is not clear whether staff training does have this effect.

For instance, despite a considerable investment in staff training nationally and locally for a number of years, it is still all too easy to see teaching that appears to involve no real lesson planning, little negotiation and the use of old fashioned and inappropriate material.

CONCLUSION

That basic skills is still on the agenda is, at the very least, reassuring. It presents an opportunity for basic education workers to draw attention to the need for high quality learning opportunities for adults who want to improve essential skills, as well as to make the link between entitlement and progression in education and these key foundation skills. On the other hand, a high profile also brings a 'spotlight' on existing provision which can sometimes be unwelcome. Expanding the scale of basic skills provision yet at the same time improving the quality may be a difficult task. It's a difficult task, but one which cannot be avoided. ■

ASSESSING BILINGUAL ADULTS FOR TRAINING

Assessment procedures often have the effect of excluding bilingual adults from training. Ann Simpson, Director of *Equality of Work*, Blackburn College, describes research which identified how problems arise, and suggests practical ways of planning assessment so that it works to people's strengths.

Assessment as a barrier

Since the introduction of the Employment Training Scheme bilingual learners have been under-represented. Amongst the factors which have contributed to this situation are the difficulties which bilingual clients face in undertaking the independent assessment process which is required for potential trainees to develop an individual training action plan.

It was in acknowledgement of these difficulties that the Training Agency commissioned *Equality at Work* to develop specialist training materials to assist assessors and others providing vocational assessment for bilingual learners. The training materials were developed following national research to establish the particular difficulties experienced by bilingual learners and how those providing assessment could best take account of them. This article describes the ways in which a standard vocational assessment process may create problems for bilingual learners and suggests modifications which may be made to take account of their specific experiences and circumstances.

Using the stronger language

Ideally bilingual clients should be offered the opportunity to participate in an asessment process using their stronger language. Where resources and circumstances have allowed, bilingual assessors have been appointed. The research indicated that unless bilingual assessors are able to show that they have undergone relevant training for a standard assessment process and take pains to clarify their specialist role as an additional service they are in danger of being perceived by bilingual clients as having lower status than their monolingual counterparts.

Boundaries

More often the research indicated that assessment was being undertaken using the services of interpreters. The role of interpreter could be taken by a formally trained and approved person or less formally by a friend or relative accompanying the client. In either case, assessors should adjust their approach to take account of a third party. As a first stage to this the assessor should establish how both client and person accompanying view the role of the person accompanying. Where the person accompanying sees their role as purely that of facilitator of communication the assessor should negotiate with them clear boundaries between the roles of assessor and that of interpreter and undertake regular checks to ensure that the clients' intended messages have been accurately received.

Greater difficulties arise where the person accompanying seeks to influence the outcomes of the assessment process. In cases such as this it is helpful if the assessor can uncover the reasons why someone may wish to influence outcomes. One example in the research arose when a father was anxious to prevent his daughter from entering what he perceived as an inappropriate training environment. The father was reassured after the assessor arranged for him and his daughter to visit a training workshop.

Informed awareness

The anxieties just described can often occur when individuals are seeking entry to occupational areas with which they have previously been unfamiliar. Unfamiliarity with the full range of occupational areas is itself a problem experienced more acutely by bilingual learners. Under-representation in many areas can be perceived as an absence of encouragement to apply. The assessor must therefore not only ensure that bilingual learners become aware of the full range of options but also that they have sufficient information and encouragement to make an informed choice.

To do this the assessor must allow time and opportunity for bilingual learners to reflect about their existing awareness and

POSITIVE ROLE MODELS

1. Hansa Patel had a background as a school cleaner. She wasn't sure what vocational area to enter so she was referred to Initial Training.

   During the Initial Training she learnt repair and maintenance skills in a multi-skills workshop. Later on she got a job in a housing association where her job was to do simple repairs on locks, plumbing and electrical appliances in their properties.

2. On a Restart Course Mohammed Ramzan visited a car components factory. While observing a machine operator he asked what communication skills the job needed.

   He was surprised to find the written work involved identification of colours and serial numbers against which he had to log components made during a shift. The machine operator also needed to understand instructions from the supervisor to ask for materials and tools when needed. Mohammed Ramzan realised that he would have no difficulty learning this set of communication skills from a friend who also worked there.

   He was successful in his application for a job as a machine operator.

perceptions of locally available occupational areas. In many cases the research indicated that perceptions were based on incomplete or inaccurate information. For example, there was a perception that all jobs in social care required a high level of post-school qualifications and for this reason many people saw no point in considering them as an option. Similarly, it was not generally known that entry into for instance care worker employment could constitute the first step on the ladder to an in-service training path, which would eventually lead to a career in social work either as a field worker or as a manager of residential provision. For these reasons, assessors may find it useful to consider establishing direct contact between bilingual clients and training schemes in unfamiliar areas.

Positive models

Another way for an assessor to encourage interest in unfamiliar occupational areas is to ensure that bilingual clients are made aware of positive role models which challenge race, gender and age stereotypes. The examples on page 4 are drawn from research and pilot training activities undertaken by Equality at Work. In some areas assessors are developing banks of such positive models and drawing on them either in person, or through the use of video as part of the assessment process.

Language difficulties

The most significant difficulties, however, are undoubtedly associated with language. Bilingual learners suffer in two ways. Often, because the assessment process is almost exclusively based on linguistic interaction, bilingual learners have no opportunity to *demonstrate* their practical skills. This in turn can have the effect of encouraging these learners in the belief that the level and type of English language skills required for a particular occupational area are greater than is actually the case and so to become demotivated.

Analysing occupational language

An assessor can address this particular difficulty in two ways. The first involves an analysis of the communication skills competencies relevant for the learners' occupational goal. Such an analysis reveals that the communication skills required by a machine operator are radically different from those required by a care assistant or a fork lift truck driver. The research showed that when an assessor had undertaken this type of analysis it was then possible to probe the learner to establish just how much vocationally-related English he/she may have and so make the task of learning English more manageable to the learner themself. In the following example the assessor uses the medium of the learners' stronger language to probe the level and extent of their occupationally-related English.

Bilingual Assessor: سُپروائزر نے آپ سے کیا کہا؟

(What did the supervisor say to you?)

Client:
Go on this machine.
Go on that machine.
Do this job first.
Don't do this.
Be careful.

Bilingual Assessor: جب اُنھوں نے مشین بند کرنے کے لئے کہا۔ تو اُن کی بات آپ کی سمجھ میں آئی؟

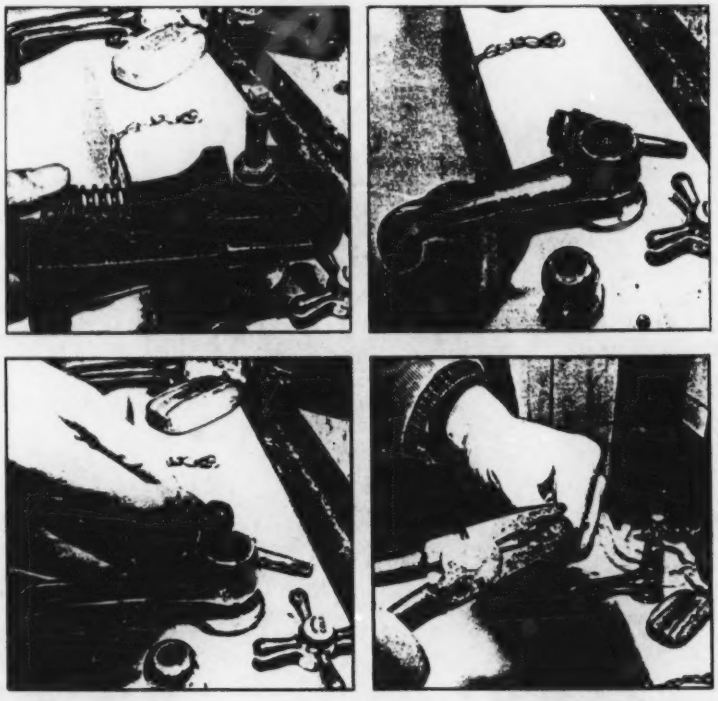
(Did you understand when he asked you to stop the machine?)

Client: جی ہاں! اُنہوں نے جو کچھ کہا میری سمجھ میں اچھی طرح آگیا۔

(Oh yes. I understand it very well.)

Practical demonstrations

The other method which an assessor can use to ease this problem is to create an opportunity for the learner to give a practical demonstration of their skills. Any simple practical exercise such as the dismantling and reassembling of a tap can be conducted in a relatively short space of time over a table-top and allow the learner to demonstrate a wide range of occupationally-related skills such as observation, sequencing, handling tools, measurement, calculation, problem solving and the capacity to follow a diagram. This type of exercise has the added advantage of creating a real context not only for the learner to demonstrate and identify for themself what skills they possess but also to identify together with the assessor what further skills may be required.

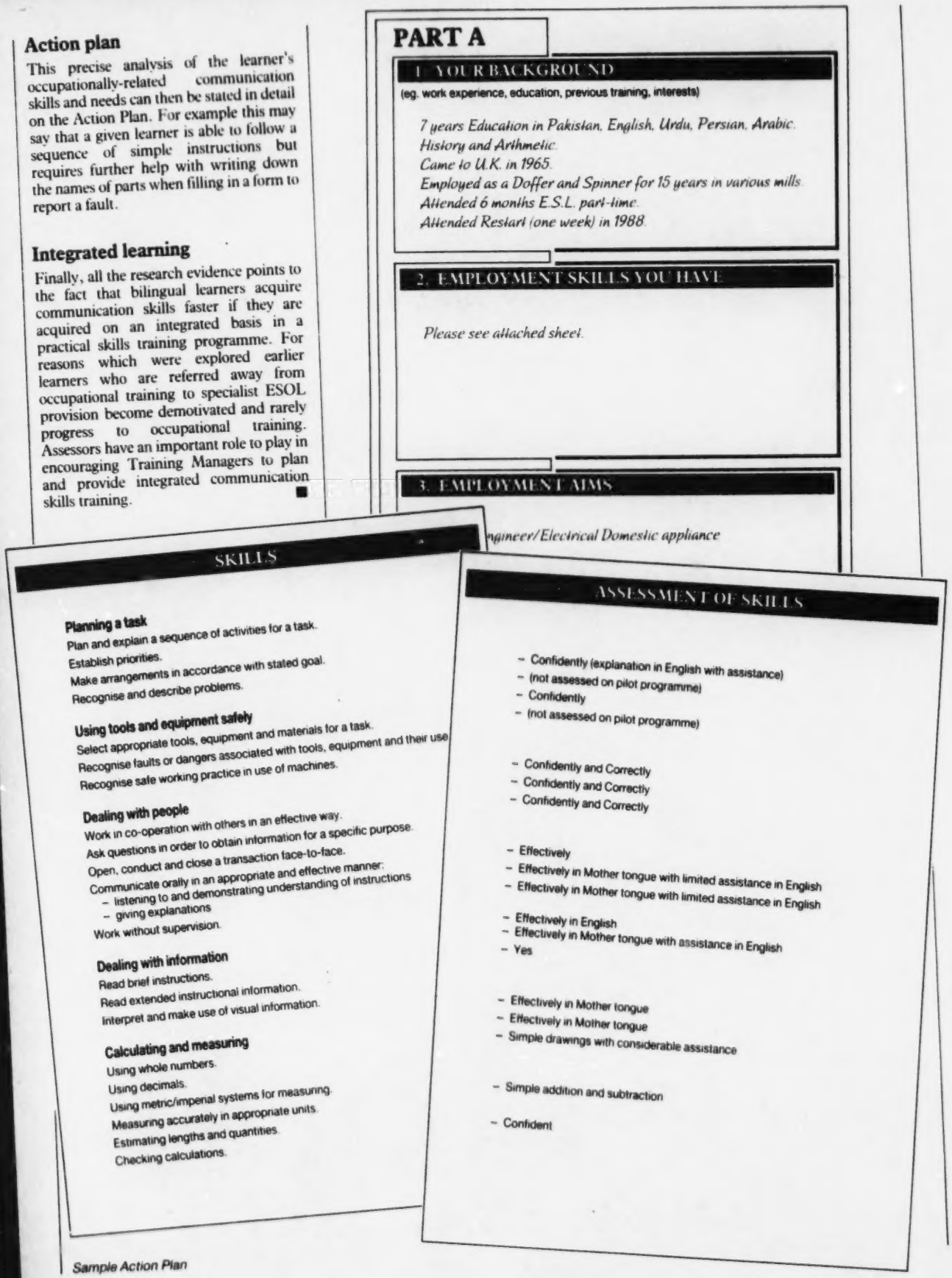


Action plan

This precise analysis of the learner's occupationally-related communication skills and needs can then be stated in detail on the Action Plan. For example this may say that a given learner is able to follow a sequence of simple instructions but requires further help with writing down the names of parts when filling in a form to report a fault.

Integrated learning

Finally, all the research evidence points to the fact that bilingual learners acquire communication skills faster if they are acquired on an integrated basis in a practical skills training programme. For reasons which were explored earlier learners who are referred away from occupational training to specialist ESOL provision become demotivated and rarely progress to occupational training. Assessors have an important role to play in encouraging Training Managers to plan and provide integrated communication skills training. ■



PART A

1. YOUR BACKGROUND

(eg. work experience, education, previous training, interests)

7 years Education in Pakistan, English, Urdu, Persian, Arabic. History and Arthmetic.
Came to U.K. in 1965.
Employed as a Doffer and Spinner for 15 years in various mills.
Attended 6 months E.S.L. part-time.
Attended Restart (one week) in 1988.

2. EMPLOYMENT SKILLS YOU HAVE

Please see attached sheet.

3. EMPLOYMENT AIMS

ngineer/Electrical Domestic appliance

SKILLS

Planning a task
Plan and explain a sequence of activities for a task.
Establish priorities.
Make arrangements in accordance with stated goal.
Recognise and describe problems.

Using tools and equipment safely
Select appropriate tools, equipment and materials for a task.
Recognise faults or dangers associated with tools, equipment and their use.
Recognise safe working practice in use of machines.

Dealing with people
Work in co-operation with others in an effective way.
Ask questions in order to obtain information for a specific purpose.
Open, conduct and close a transaction face-to-face.
Communicate orally in an appropriate and effective manner:
- listening to and demonstrating understanding of instructions
- giving explanations

Work without supervision.

Dealing with information
Read brief instructions.
Read extended instructional information.
Interpret and make use of visual information.

Calculating and measuring
Using whole numbers.
Using decimals.
Using metric/imperial systems for measuring.
Measuring accurately in appropriate units.
Estimating lengths and quantities.
Checking calculations.

ASSESSMENT OF SKILLS

- Confidently (explanation in English with assistance)
- (not assessed on pilot programme)
- Confidently
- (not assessed on pilot programme)

- Confidently and Correctly
- Confidently and Correctly
- Confidently and Correctly

- Effectively
- Effectively in Mother tongue with limited assistance in English
- Effectively in Mother tongue with limited assistance in English

- Effectively in English
- Effectively in Mother tongue with assistance in English
- Yes

- Effectively in Mother tongue
- Effectively in Mother tongue
- Simple drawings with considerable assistance

- Simple addition and subtraction

- Confident

Sample Action Plan

READING ALOUD – OR NOT?

Is reading aloud a good way to improve reading fluency and understanding? In this article, Heather Clary, County ABE Development Worker for Cambridgeshire, questions its value and offers some alternatives.

Performing, or understanding?

'How will I be able to help students read if I do not hear them read aloud?' Reading aloud is an experience we have all had as children at school. It is the way in which the teacher checked out progress. It is not uncommon to find a similar process occuring within ABE groups. But what is actually happening when this occurs? More often than not, it is the tutor correcting or filling in words the learner either mispronounces or cannot decode.

The fact that tutors feel anxious about hearing students read aloud is recognition that a technique commonly used in school may not be the best approach to use with adults whose school experiences may not have been happy ones.

Before deciding to ask adult learners to read, tutors need to consider what is meant by reading and how good ABE practice relates to the reading programme of the individual student.

Reading involves a combination of factors including the skills of decoding print which can take the form of individual words, phrases and sentences, phonics or the sounding out of part or whole words and guessing words in context. The 'good' reader is able to use all these strategies. However, unless the reader understands and can comprehend text, then the individual *cannot* be said to be reading. Reading is ultimately a meaning making process.

Decoding text by reading it aloud perfectly can be nothing more than 'barking at print' if the student has no idea as to what the text is about. ***Bruce was asked to read aloud a brief article from the local newspaper. The rest of the group followed the text. The tutor asked him a question relating to the article he had just read.***

'Wait a minute, I'll have to read it again', was the reply. This time Bruce read the article 'in his head' and came up with the correct answer.

This kind of response is not uncommon and reinforces the fact that reading aloud is not always reading in its true sense. Very often when reading aloud, the student is more concerned about the decoding and sounding out of words correctly in order to gain the praise of the tutor or the rest of the group rather than gaining meaning from the text. Reading becomes a performance.

There is research evidence to support that reading aloud is a very specialised skill and that it has *very little to do with comprehension*.

Alternatives

There are alternative methods for tutors to find out whether a student has understood what the text is about without listening to the student reading aloud. ***Joe is a beginning reader. He has built up a basic vocabulary of words mainly through using the 'Language Experience' technique. His tutor has taped the 'Days of the Week' series of readers plus a set of worksheets to support each book. Joe can follow the story either with or without the tape. Joe also had the choice of either taping his reply to the questions or writing them.***

Sometimes Joe is asked to re-tell in his own words a story he has read. Either way, Joe can demonstrate that he understands the text but has not had to read out loud.

Word recognition and the value of increased listening and speaking opportunities for a student enables them to develop important reading skills without having to read aloud.

It is important to provide positive role models for students in their reading.

It can be fairly safely assumed that those of you reading this article, are 'good readers' – the positive model which most students would hope to emulate. It can also be assumed that the majority of you are *not* reading this article out loud, anymore than you would normally consider reading aloud the telephone directory or the newspaper. In other words, the 'good' reader is also the 'silent' reader.

Furthermore, good readers try not to read too slowly. If this happens, much of what has been 'read' has been forgotten by the time the end of the sentence or paragraph has been reached. Reading aloud is a much slower process than silent reading. Comprehension of the text is more likely to be lost by using such a method.

We should explain to students why we are asking them to read silently so they understand why silent reading is more likely to be reading in its true sense. It is not 'cheating' because the tutor cannot hear every word.

The reading programme should also seek to build on a student's existing knowledge, strengths and positive experiences.

Anxiety

As stated earlier, reading aloud is usually associated with school, and school is frequently associated with failure for many ABE students.

Helen, a student in a local scheme, recalls her experience of reading at school. ***'We always read round the class, taking turns. We read a paragraph each. I spent the whole lesson working out which paragraph was mine so I could practise before the teacher got to me. I hated it. I got so embarrassed in front of everyone I always went red, especially when I made a mistake.'***

Helen's experience of reading aloud that she brings to the ABE group is one of anxiety and loss of confidence. 'Making a mistake' was seen to be wrong, not as a starting point for new learning.

Helen's experience is typical of many adults. By asking adults to read aloud, we run the risk of bringing back all the negative attitudes and feelings that are associated with failure.

Purposes for reading

Having identified reasons why reading aloud is not something that should be encouraged as normal practice with adults, are there any circumstances when students should be asked to read aloud?

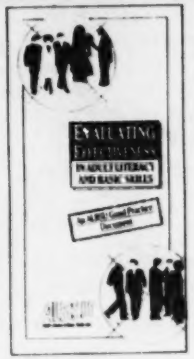
There can be no general answer because each situation is based on the individual student. But tutors do need to ask themselves each time they approach reading with a student *why* they are asking them to read and if they are asking the student to read aloud what is the *purpose* of doing so?

It may be that the student needs to develop oral reading techniques. Possible students in this category could be the parent wishing to read to a child, or the adult who is required to read aloud in church. Whatever the circumstances, the reading materials used would need to reflect the purpose of reading aloud.

It may be that the tutor needs to analyse the way in which the student is approaching reading. By careful analysis of the quality of errors, not merely the numbers of mistakes made, the tutor will know where to help the student most effectively.

All learning has to take place in a positive learning environment which does not bring back the negative, failure model that the adult experienced in the past. It needs to take account of the purposes of reading. Above all, it has to be about meaning. Reading aloud should be the exception for ABE students, not the norm. ■

1. Bruder, Mary Newton, Shirley A Biggs *Oral Reading and adult poor readers: Implications for Practice* Journal of Reading, May 1988



Evaluating Effectiveness

A new document entitled *'Evaluating Effectiveness In Adult Literacy and Basic Skills'* has just been published by ALBSU. *'Evaluating Effectiveness'* is a good practice document designed to evaluate the effectiveness of basic skills provision.

'Evaluating Effectiveness' attempts to provide a framework for considering the effectiveness and efficiency of basic skills work with adults.

The document also sets out a general approach to evaluation, suggests some possible 'Programme Indicators' for basic skills and provides a Checklist for basic skills programme organisers to help them judge the effectiveness of current basic skills provision.

'Evaluating Effectiveness' is available from ALBSU, free of charge.

Language Issues – the Journal of NATECLA*

*(*National Association of Teachers of English and other Community Languages to Adults)*

Language Support; Numeracy for Bilingual People; Creole Languages; Creative Writing Using Mother Tongue; Classroom Interaction – these are some of the topics covered in the six issues of this journal to date.

Language Issues is a journal which covers the political and social issues relating to the teaching of language to adults in Britain and other countries. It locates itself in the "middle ground" between the academic and practical, and has already contributed much to methodology and practice.

If you work with speakers of languages other than English, or just want to keep up with the issues concerning a multilingual society, "Language Issues" is essential reading for you.

The next issue (Vol. 4 No. 1) is concerned with Language, Identity and Equal Opportunity, and the one after that, due out later in 1990, marks International Literacy year with articles on literacy in Nicaragua, the use of written Creole, and many other subjects related to literacy.

Vol 4, Nos. 1 and 2: *£7.50 + £1.00 p&p (for 2 issues) individuals, £15.00 + £1.00 p&p (2 issues) institutions.*

Back copies: *£2.50 individuals, £4.50 institutions per copy + 50p p&p.*

From: NATECLA National Centre, Hall Green College, Floodgate Street, Digbeth, Birmingham B5 5SU.

Enquiries about NATECLA membership to the same address.

Information

BETTER BASIC SKILLS BETTER WORK

"Unless we have skills comparable with our competitors then our chances of sustaining the quality of life which we currently enjoy are uncomfortably close to zero."
John Banham, Director General, CBI

"Future generations, future employment and future technology need good basic skills more than ever."
HRH The Princess Royal

"It's about morale, improved promotion, greater efficiency, innovation and a flexible workforce. Basic skills can unlock talents that have been trapped in many people."
Norman Willis, General Secretary, TUC

Better Basic Skills – Better Work was a major event for employers held at the CBI on September 13, with funding from the Training Agency, to mark International Literacy Year. The speakers were: HRH The Princess Royal, John Banham, Norman Willis, John MacGregor, Robert Jackson and Peter Davis. They all highlighted the need for employers to make basic skills a priority, the positive examples of initiatives by employers, and the value, in the workplace, of the new Wordpower and Numberpower Certificates.

Robert Jackson, Minister for Training, Dept. of Employment, John MacGregor, (then) Secretary of State for Education and Science, HRH The Princess Royal and Peter Davis, Chairman ALBSU Management Committee, at Better Basic Skills, Better Work.

Photo: Ian Cross

"The 90's are the skills decade and basic skills training is an important part of the training effort we need, all of us, to sustain."
Robert Jackson, Minister for Training, Dept. of Employment

"A better educated workforce is a priority for all of us. I warmly commend the Basic Skills Accreditation Initiative."
John MacGregor, Secretary of State for Education & Science

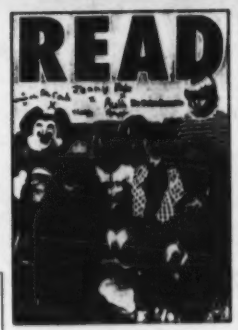
Call Free for Help . . .

This year ALBSU celebrated International Literacy Day with the production of a large quantity of car/window stickers announcing a new national free telephone number – **0800 700 987** – funded by ALBSU. Callers to this service will be put in touch with someone in their area, who will be able to offer advice and information on the basic skills provision available locally.

ILY: Parents and Literacy

This poster of the Walton parents reading with their children, the only all-girl sextuplets in the world, has been produced to coincide with the focus on Parents and Children during International Literacy Year. Copies of the poster are being distributed to Adult Basic Education Schemes, Primary and Special Schools and Libraries.

ALBSU is grateful to the Walton family for agreeing to make the poster and to World Book – Childcraft International for donating a set of Childcraft and World Book to the Walton family, as part of its contribution to International Literacy Year.



Numeracy among adults

The results of a numeracy survey conducted for the Basic Skills Accreditation Initiative were announced at a press conference on October 8th 1990.

The survey was conducted by Research Resources Ltd., amongst a sample of 1034 adults. Adults between the ages of 21 and 60 were interviewed throughout England, Wales and Scotland. Half the questions required people to make fairly straightforward calculations. Most of the rest were designed to test people's understanding of numerical concepts. The questions were related to the standards developed in the new Numberpower certificate awarded by City and Guilds. The questions were based as far as possible on real situations and used real documents, reflecting number people come across in everyday life.

12% of the sample could not cope with simple addition. *(How much would it cost to buy a T-shirt for £7.50, a pair of socks for £2 and a pair of jeans for £15?)* 20% did not know what was meant by the term "area" and 39% could not work out the area of a wall 12 feet by 8 feet.

Similar percentages could not cope with simple multiplication and subtraction. 40% could not cope with simple division. *(Divide a bill of £30.15 five ways).*

The survey also revealed significant problems with the 24 hour clock, including with timetables. Percentages created problems for well over half the respondents.

The older age group (45 to 60) had consistently more difficulties than the younger age groups. Men performed consistently better than women.

For copy of summary send large (A4) SAE to ALBSU.

Language Guidelines

by Alistair Smith

A handbook for the development of language skills across the curriculum, "Language Guidelines" offers practical help and advice to Further Education Lecturers in all departments on teaching methods and approaches suitable for students with literacy or numeracy difficulties. Sections include: Assessing Students' Language Skills, Encouraging Reading and Research Skills, Teaching Methods and Producing Materials. The book is one of the outcomes of an ALBSU sponsored project at Wakefield College.

Produced by ALBSU and published by Hodder and Stoughton.

128pp

ISBN 0 340 52848 6

£17.50

Available direct from: Hodder and Stoughton, Mill Road, Dunton Green, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 2YA.

THE INPRINT INITIATIVE

When basic education tutors and students in Birmingham had the opportunity of working with the local newspaper, and publishing their writing in it, they took it up enthusiastically. Jenny Blackaby and Louise Johnson, ABE Co-ordinators, describe the process and the outcomes.

IN PRINT

The Birmingham In Print Project was the result of a collaborative venture between Newspapers in Education, a local newspaper, The Birmingham Post and Mail, and the Adult Basic Education Service. Newspaper publishers are interested to forge a link with the Adult Basic Education service because they acknowledge the powerful part newspapers play in communication. On a more pragmatic level they are always on the look out for ways to increase readership and this was seen as one way of achieving that end. The end result of this collaboration was a page of student writings published in The Post and Mail to coincide with the city's Readers and Writers Festival. It provided an opportunity for Adult Basic Education students in the city to see their writing in print.

DIARY OF EVENTS

May

An initial meeting between representatives of The Post and Mail, Newspapers in Education and the Adult Basic Education Service took place. Lots of enthusiasm and ideas were generated. Short and Long Term initiatives were discussed including promoting students' work, guided tours of the Post and Mail building and talks by newspaper staff. It was agreed that the aim of the project should be to devote one page of the newspaper to student writing in November. Anything more ambitious was to take place the following year to coincide with International Literacy Year. The project could be set up in two ways – 1. By approaching an established ABE group or 2. By creating a writers group. We realised that with careful planning and good communications we could involve the whole city instead of the select few. We then had to get our skates on to involve as many students, volunteers and paid tutors as possible.

June

The ABE Co-ordinators for the twelve areas of the city were informed about the In Print Project. It was understood by all the co-ordinators that the pieces of student writing that did not appear in the newspaper would be printed in magazines in the areas. This was to ensure that students should not feel that their writing had been rejected.

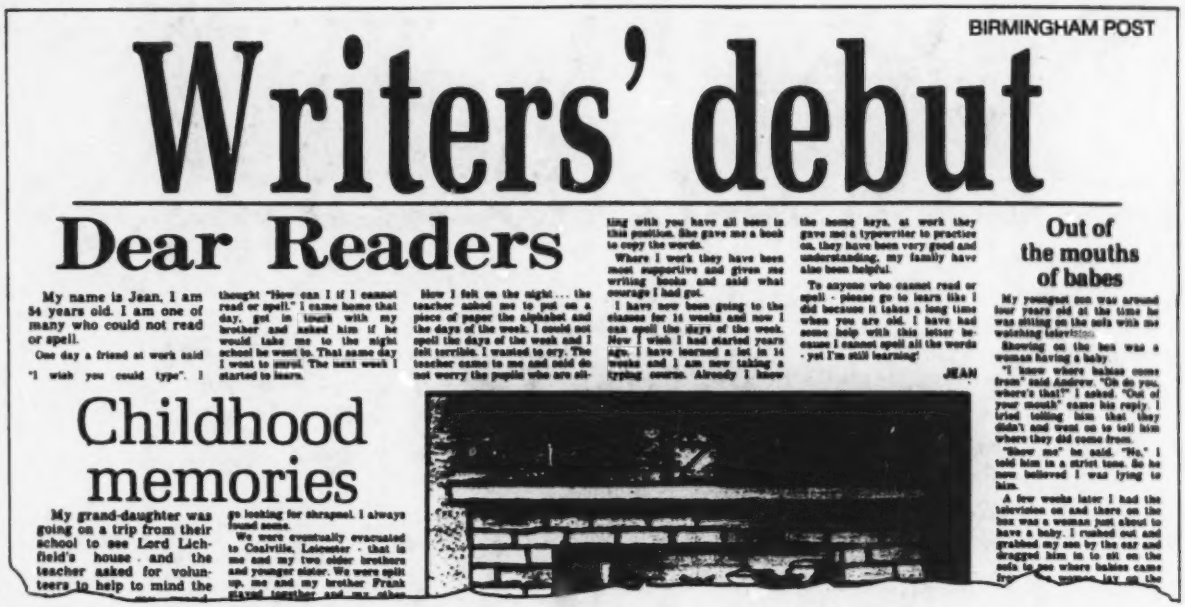
July

A steering group was formed. This group planned an Information Day for September and clarified the aims and timescale for the project.

September

The Information Day was held for volunteers, tutors and co-ordinators at which there was an input by The Birmingham Post and Mail and Newspapers in Education. This gave everyone an insight into the working of a newspaper, how to prepare good copy etc. There were also workshops with the practical aim of helping to stimulate and

Preparatory work *photo: Louise Johnson.*



BIRMINGHAM POST

Writers' debut

Dear Readers

My name is Jean. I am 54 years old. I am one of many who could not read or spell.

One day a friend at work said "I wish you could type". I thought "How can I if I cannot read or spell." I came home that day, got in touch with my brother and asked him if he would take me to the night school he went to. That same day I went to enrol. The next week I started to learn.

How I felt on the night ... the teacher asked me to put on a piece of paper the alphabet and the days of the week. I could not spell the days of the week and I felt terrible. I wanted to cry. The teacher came to me and said do not worry the pupils who are sitting with you have all been in this position. She gave me a book to copy the words.

Where I work they have been most supportive and given me writing books and said what courage I had got.

I have now been going to the classes for 14 weeks and now I can spell the days of the week. Now I wish I had started years ago. I have learned a lot in 14 weeks and I am now taking a typing course. Already I know the home keys, at work they gave me a typewriter to practice on, they have been very good and understanding, my family have also been helpful.

To anyone who cannot read or spell - please go to learn like I did because it takes a long time when you are old. I have had some help with this letter because I cannot spell all the words - yet I'm still learning"

JEAN

Childhood memories

My grand-daughter was going on a trip from their school to see Lord Lichfield's house and the teacher asked for volunteers to help to mind the

go looking for shrapnel. I always found some.

We were eventually evacuated to Coalville, Leicester - that is me and my two older brothers and younger sister. We were split up, me and my brother Frank

Out of the mouths of babes

My youngest son was around four years old at the time he was sitting on the sofa with me watching television.

Showing on the box was a woman having a baby.

"I know where babies come from" said Andrew. "Oh do you, where's that?" I asked. "Out of your mouth" came his reply. I tried telling him that they didn't and went on to tell him where they did come from.

"Show me" he said. "No," I told him in a strict tone. So he now believed I was lying to him.

A few weeks later I had the television on and there on the box was a woman just about to have a baby. I rushed out and grabbed my son by the ear and dragged him in to sit on the sofa to see where babies came

produce student writing. This gave everyone the chance to be involved in the next stage of getting into print, as well as being able to ask 'how is it going to be done?'

October

The next step was to form an editorial group which was to consist of one original member of the steering group, one volunteer and the rest students. It was at this stage that we started encountering difficulties. Students were reluctant to volunteer to be part of the editorial group – perhaps the name put them off. It was also difficult to plan a meeting at a time and place which suited everyone. The fact that some students had to travel from one side of the city to the other did not help. In view of the shortage of time we made a unilateral decision to take In Print to a group. This proved to be the right decision. From this moment on things really began to happen! Student writings, being submitted, changed from a trickle to a flood. There was clearly going to be no shortage of material, the main difficulty being to choose from the many and varied pieces. The editorial selection took place in the ABE group. The same group gave up time to count words and decide which pictures should be included. They arranged the page and selected titles and headlines. The sense of excitement grew as the deadline approached.

November

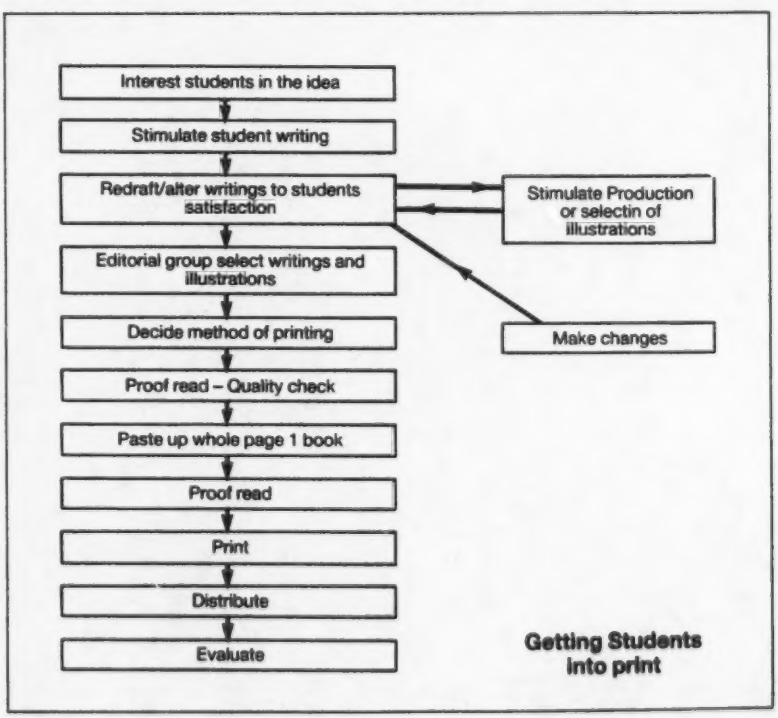
We delivered the completed page to The Post and Mail and saw it IN PRINT on Friday 24th November. It felt as if all the effort put into the project had paid off as hundreds of glossy copies of the page were delivered to the areas.

December

The authors of the pieces selected for publication in the newspapers attended a social to share their sense of achievement with others who had been involved with the project.

CONCLUSION

The diagram illustrates the process that went on in Birmingham to produce the page of student writings. By involving the twelve areas of the city, a large part of that process took place at grass root level. Participation at all levels was the key to the project. Pieces that were not selected for publication were published in area magazines and booklets. We have learnt many lessons in the process of producing our page which will help us in any further collaborative ventures in International Literacy Year and beyond. Thanks to Newspapers In Education especially Richard Beamish for helping to initiate the project and to the Birmingham Post and Mail staff for giving us this opportunity. ■



Getting Students into print

ILY IN XIAMEN

An ambitious programme to extend adult literacy has been underway in Xiamen, in South East China. Dr Fang Xiao, of the Department of Journalism and Communication at the Xiamen University, describes what is happening.

Planning and targets

To meet ILY, a Meeting of Literacy was held by the City of Xiamen, the twin City of Cardiff, a Special Economic Zone in the southeast of China in 1989. According to the proposal of the Meeting, some 15,000 to 20,000 semi-illiterate and illiterate persons aged between 15 and 40 were required to attend literacy classes and to reach the literacy standard and the literacy rate of the population should reach 98% in both urban and rural areas of the City by stages within three years.

After the meeting, both administrative and academic sides were involved to fulfill the target and a series of Literacy Responsibility Contracts were signed among:

- leaderships of the Xiamen City, Tongan County, towns and villages
- leaderships of City Education Commission, County Education Bureau, academic districts and local primary schools.

The main tasks of the local administrative side were to financially support local schools, to set up adult literacy night-classes and to persuade local semi-illiterate and illiterate people to attend the classes. The tasks of academic side were to provide facilities and local teachers for the classes. Based on the contracts, all the local regular primary schools had responsibilities to eliminate illiteracy and became the main literacy bases in their own areas.

Activities and progress

The literacy campaign was mainly taking place in rural areas. In Maxiang Town, under the Tongan County, for instance, 38 literacy night-classes were set up by the Maxiang Academic District at 34 villages and streets in one and a half years. Over 1500 of 2700 semi-illiterate and illiterate persons attended night classes. 45 of the best local teachers were chosen to teach them.

To improve the teaching quality, evaluation of literacy classes was organized by the Academic District and supervised by the County Education Bureau and the City Education Commission. Teachers were required to make their own teaching plans based on the education levels of students and to improve their teaching methods. The students were required to study for 400 teaching hours to learn 100 texts of Adult Literacy Books I and II. Apart from homework, 24 unit tests and semi-term examinations were followed by final examinations organized by the Academic District.

According to the state literacy standard requirement, the graduates should be able to read 1500 to 2000 Chinese characters, to understand short articles, to write notes and to do basic accounts. In 1989 and 1990, 1503 persons in this town passed the final examination, reached this standard and got the literacy certification. In the whole city, over 6000 persons got the certification.

In order to meet the needs of local people, extra adult classes and schools were organized.

Further Literacy Class

The graduates of literacy classes were required to study for a further 120 teaching hours to prevent them from 'returning to illiteracy'. Book I for Grade 4 of regular primary school was used as a textbook.

Senior Primary Class

The graduates of literacy classes were encouraged to continue to study for 800 teaching hours. Both literature and mathematics textbooks for Grade 4 and 5 of regular primary school were used. After graduation, their education level would be equal to the graduates of a primary school.

Cultural & Technical School

Those who were interersted in the specialist courses, such as fishery and agriculture courses could attend short time or long time technical training courses.

Adult Secondary School

Those graduates of primary school could attend the night-school and study the required courses of regular secondary school.

Teaching Chinese characters to students at an adult literacy night class in Maxiang.

Problems and challenges

'It is not easy to eliminate illiteracy in the countryside,' said Mr Huang Zhongkai, an Adult Education Officer in the Xiamen Education Commission, who has been involved with adult education for over 30 years. The main problems were:

- Most of the ladies aged over 25 not only have to work during day-time but also are busy with house work in the evening. They need tutors to help them to study at home or at the study group nearby instead of studying at night-classes in the schools. This means that more tutors and time are required for their literacy education.
- Some illiterate persons who are moving around with business may not be able to attend the night-classes to obtain literacy education.
- More financial support is required for further literacy education. Those who cannot carry on their further education after graduating from the literacy classes may forget what they have learnt and become illiterate again.
- Although compulsory primary education started to be instituted this year and the attendance rate of primary schools reached 99%, there are some pupils who drop out of schools. They may become the new illiterate. ■

REVIEWS

Step by Step

by Mona McNee

available from 2 The Crescent, Toftwood, East Dereham, Norfolk.

Price: £4.00

ISBN 0951579401

Given the essential nature of literacy, we would surely welcome any method of learning/teaching that ensured once and for all that all people could learn to read and write effectively. This book claims to offer just such a method – 'teaching children, and adults, to read is simple and does not take long . . .' (page 1). The book includes a system of work and games (divided into 91 days, – or units, of work). It is based on the belief that 'teaching reading is phonics; phonics is teaching children how to read' (page 1) and that 'we read with our ears, we spell with our ears' (page 4). The book also includes a considerable number of comments and views of the author which are designed, it would seem, to persuade parents and teachers to trust and use the proffered approach – (it is) 'SAFE, safe for all ages including adults, safe for pre-schools, dyslexics, gipsies, people in prison, everyone' (page 3).

The author's case is weakened from the start by the fact that the programme offered is not entirely phonic: towards the end when dealing with irregular letter patterns it offers approaches and explanations that are **not** phonic (ie auditory) by going into some detail on 'letter strings' which are surely visual – how else can we explain 'ough' for example? So even before this programme is completed, it had stopped showing how all reading and spelling can, as claimed, be done 'with the ears.' We cannot tell whether the author realises this contradiction or not, but the trusting reader is already being confused.

The real disappointment however is that in supporting her arguments so vigorously, the author fails to discuss the many alternative approaches and indeed she fires one salvo at them all, no doubt designed to destroy them all at one blow – 'whole word teaching is the Thalidomide of education. When it stops attainment rockets. It goes under many names: look say, sentence method, paired reading, shared reading, apprenticeship, 'real books', whole languages' (page 119). As a statement, that is breathtaking in its inaccuracy. It is also a good example of the emotive generalisations that litter the book. Indeed there is very little offered in support of the claims made, other than personal anecdotes and views of this nature. But it is written with passion and could convince the anxious parent. (We are not sure that **any** 'adult', 'gipsy', 'person in prison' would wish to be seen using a book with a picture of a teddy bear on the front and several more inside – and we hope that any tutors working with such adult students would have the sensitivity to realise this).

ABE practice is represented in the book by the statement: 'Much of Adult Literacy (ALBSU) "help" is "language experience". Oh for the good old days of c-a-t: cat!' (page 121). The author appears to be oblivious of the potential richness of learning opportunities offered by 'language experience' – and indeed, that this will include study of the letter patterns and phonic work that emerge through the 'language experience'.

Nowhere in the book do we find any discussion of 'comprehension' or how to achieve this essential purpose of decoding print. Nowhere in this book is 'context' discussed: the whole words approach is mocked and recognising word shapes is mocked – and indeed we would acknowledge that both can fail if taught in isolation and that it is necessary for readers and writers to be able, **amongst other things**, to recognise and use common letter patterns and sounds and to be able to understand the probability and possibility of spelling patterns in English.

This book has not persuaded us that the way to achieve literacy is by studying phonics to the exclusion of all other aspects of literacy! We remain convinced that a multi-sensory approach, developed with each student according to what appears to work for him/her is the only way to tackle his/her literacy.

In fact the caricature, omission and lack of researched evidence all point to an ill argued book. We rest our case by offering another example of the author's argument and logic: 'spared look say, the council estates of 1950s would now be the new stock broker belts. Look say is the biggest single factor in our social disintegration. Intensive systematic phonics is the ladder out of the "pit" ' (page 118).

Janet Ash and Tina Clark
Gloucestershire Education Authority

Bagels with Babushka

by Hilda Cohen

Published by Gatehouse Project, St. Luke's, Sawley Road, Manchester M10 8DB

Price: £2.00

ISBN 0 906253 31 4

This book is about the reminiscences of the early life of a Jewish girl growing up in Salford between the wars.

Mrs Cohen had been writing for many years for her own amusement and her family's interest when she joined a Creative Writing class in Manchester. She was encouraged to put her memoirs together to form this, the first part of her autobiography.

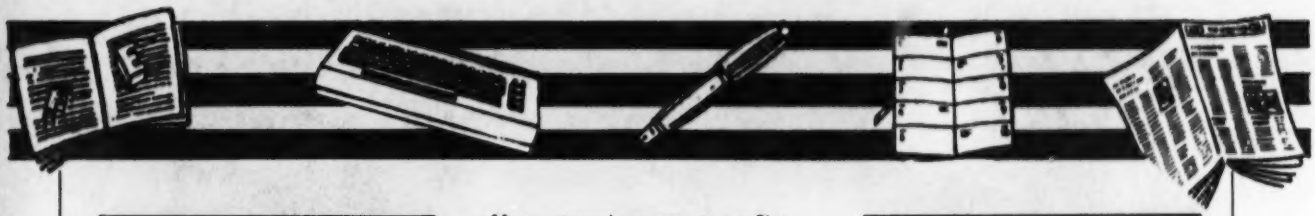
From her earliest memory of playing under the kitchen table with her sister at the age of three, through the conflict between a German grandmother and a Russian Babushka, to the time of her marriage and motherhood when she left Manchester for London in 1939, we see life through her eyes.

She gives us an insight into school life when she experienced discomfort and even terror. But there are also memories of a loving and supportive family and a community that looked after its own.

As childhood was left behind, the author tells of her working life and a growing interest and involvement in political issues of the day, when Anti-Semitism was widespread and the approaching Second World War was to touch the lives of everyone.

This slim volume is an inspiration and encouragement to others. It manages to retain humour and the common touch. This book would prove most useful to the advanced reader in Adult Basic Education and might well be the means of encouraging some individuals to write their own autobiography.

Margaret Broad, Co-ordinator/tutor
Hanley ABE Centre
Staffordshire Education Authority



Reading for Meaning: Selected Teaching Strategies

by Valerie Meyer and Donald Keefe

Published by Lifelong Learning Books Teacher Resource Series

Available from: Avanti Books, 8 Parsons Green, Boulton Road, Pin Green Industrial Estate, Stevenage, Herts SG1 4QG.

Price: £10.95 + 50p p&p

ISBN 0 673 24342 0

This book puts forward the theory that poor readers can best improve by looking for understanding in the text, rather than concentrating on the mechanics of the reading process. It is promoted as a 'recipe book for teachers and tutors', being mainly concerned with techniques and ideas for working with poor readers, who are divided into four distinct categories.

A note on terminology at the beginning is especially useful as the references throughout the book relate to the USA system of education.

This is followed by a good, straightforward chapter on adult learning. I found this clear and helpful with useful points on how to talk to potential students before beginning tuition. The subject matter was familiar and similar to ABE practice in the UK.

Theories of the reading process are dealt with briefly, in a clear manner, with specific books recommended for readers who want to take this further. The text is heavily weighted towards theories which support the 'reading for meaning' idea.

The remaining chapters of the book are devoted to 'profiles' of four types of student, ranging from SLD to post-basic readers. Each 'profile' has a case study to illustrate the group under discussion, a list of educational characteristics for the group, and a series of teaching strategies to be used.

Each chapter outlines student problems which are familiar, and the ideas for tuition are interesting, although many are well-known and used with students here.

I feel that the book is over-simplistic in categorising students and teaching techniques, although it is suggested that ideas from more than one profile can be mixed if appropriate.

The idea of fitting students into one of four categories seems to conflict with the UK ethos of treating each student as an individual whose problems, skills and needs are unique.

This is an interesting, enjoyable book, with useful ideas. I shall use it to dip into when looking for inspiration for the solution to a problem with a student, but if it is indeed a 'recipe book', it is not one on which I would feel confident in basing a total diet.

Lynn Mulford
Area Organiser for ABE
Suffolk Education Authority

Using Your Library

by Leicestershire Adult Basic Education Service and Leicestershire Libraries and Information Service

Published by Leicestershire County Council Publications, Leicestershire Libraries and Information Service, 1st Floor, Thames Tower, Navigation Street, Leicestershire LE1 3TZ and Leicestershire Adult Basic Education Service, Room 400, County Hall, Glenfield, Leicester.

Price: 99p

No ISBN number

As a tutor in an Open Learning Centre based in a library I was very interested in this book. It is well written, attractively presented and covers all the things a newcomer to a public library would need to know including what to do if your dog does something nasty to a library book.

Some of the language is rather difficult in view of the fact that it is written for A.B.E. students. However, I do like the way 'special library words' are introduced with an explanation of their meaning. It is important to extend the student's vocabulary with appropriate language but I feel it would need tutor support to help students read and understand this material.

I think it is a useful model which could be adopted by other local authorities to encourage wider use of the libraries as well as providing supplementary reading material for ABE centres. Owing to the number of references to Leicestershire I do not think it could be used outside that area in its present format.

Helen Papworth
Tutor of Rhyl Second Chance Centre
Clwyd Education Authority

Technology and Us

by Students of the Mary Ward Centre and the Hammersmith Neighbourhood Literacy Scheme

Published by The Mary Ward Centre, 42 Queen Square, London WC1N 3AQ.

Price: £1.00

No ISBN number

This compilation, illustrated by photographs and line drawings, contains eleven short texts in which students each express a personal view of technology. Various aspects are touched upon, including mention of automation in the home as well as office technology, while responses both of anger and admiration are to be found in what has been written about the impact of modern technology. I found it interesting to read, although a rather disconcerting mixture of pieces, some rhetorical in style, others more purely personal in tone, with – as is to be expected – varying degrees of textual complexity.

A range of personal perspectives and views are represented, and, taken as a whole, the collection implicitly poses some questions and issues which might be further explored in discussion. A car assembly worker, made redundant by factory automation, writes: "Thinking about all these questions made me realise that I would be free to do other things like perhaps training robots, after all they may be efficient at doing a task but they cannot think which is something we certainly can do . . ." These words perhaps summarise why this collection can be of interest to other students, providing food for thought, with or without a word-processor.

Pat Lloyd
On Line To Learn OLC
Nottingham Education Authority

Newslink Readers Worksheets Series 1 and Series 2

Published by Printing & Publishing Unit

Available from Leeds City Council, 27 Harrogate Road, Leeds LS7 3PD. Cheques payable to: Leeds City Council.

Price £6.00 per pack incl p+p

The 2 packs include 5 readers and a worksheet.

No ISBN number

All the readers have an attractive inviting front cover aimed at adults and young people. The illustrations are in

black and white and reflect the influence of newspapers and television. The titles were also interesting and intended to generate discussions as they are based on traditional newspaper titles. For example, A Passenger Is Dead, shows a hijacker holding a pilot at gunpoint and the text relates the familiar story of a hijacking. The story is short and sharp, once again reflecting the media influence.

The students who made use of them found that the pictures gave a graphic illustration of the text, which was both a useful aid to reading and an encouragement to those needing help with reading the short text accompanying each picture.

The text is set out in short lines in a pseudo newspaper format and students were encouraged to read on.

Students who read these are on the Foundation Skills courses. The range of the readers were pre-readers to those more able readers who coped easily with the text. Some of the comments:

"I would like to read this on my own, I like the pictures, but I'll need help."

"Yes, it was good, I'll read the others. It didn't take me long to read it, I like that."

"The print is too small."

"The lines are too close."

"I don't understand some of the words."

"Oh great, there's some more for me to read."

The tutors were a little more critical. Whilst they appreciated the illustrations, titles or short lines, there was unanimous criticism about the size of print and the difficulty of some of the vocabulary.

The worksheets accompanying the readers have a poor production quality and are stapled together. Continuous use would find the worksheets falling apart.

The first page of the worksheets has Tutor's notes. This gives a clear explanation as to the use of the worksheet and clearly states that the first two worksheets do not involve writing.

It is possible to complete the checklist with a series of ticks and crosses. However, the tutors were reluctant to applaud the success of the worksheets because the print is too small. There is far too much reading and, unlike the reader, the A4 size worksheets have made full use of the page. This confronts the reader with the daunting prospect of having to read it all!

Janet Robbins
Basic Skills Co-ordinator
Chippenham College
Wiltshire Education Authority

Workplace Education – Tapping Your Greatest Asset in the 1990's

by the Scottish Community Education Council

Published by and available from the Scottish Community Education Council.

Price: £3.00 inc. p&p

No ISBN number

Section 1:
Well written and structured. It covers crucial issues which are currently concerning employers and uses the language of industry.

Section 2:
Gives a comprehensive outline of various schemes, presenting them in a positive light. Concise and informative. It may have been more useful to illustrate the Workbase scheme by using a case study as it is unique in bringing the unions and employers together on a joint training initiative. Furthermore, the success and strength of the Workbase model comes from the methodology, whereby training programmes are developed from needs arising directly from the shop floor employees.

Section 3
A very readable section on the Scottish experience. It draws out and highlights individual need, whilst relating these directly to the workplace. The conclusions could have been more hard hitting concentrating on the inherent dangers for industry of ignoring these needs. For example the rapidly widening skills gap.

Section 4
This section is useful as it explains in some detail the practical operations of each scheme. However, there was an opportunity here to emphasise and really push the constructive outcomes and benefits for employers, for ultimately they are the pay-masters. A crucial element missing from this section is explicitly relating literacy and numeracy needs to current public and private sector issues, i.e. CCT, Redeployment, Skills Shortages, etc.

Conclusion
This section does touch upon some of the issues mentioned above and emphasizes the benefits to all who may be involved in WPE. As a concluding section it did not leave the reader with much food for thought. I feel there could have been some fine tuning of ideas and issues which would enable the reader to focus on their own workplace requirements.

Overall a good and well documented booklet looking at the difficult area of workplace education.

Stephanie Pordage
Workbase Training

Relative to me

Published by Crocus Books

Available from Common World Ltd, Chestwood House, 21 Newton Street, Manchester M1 1FZ

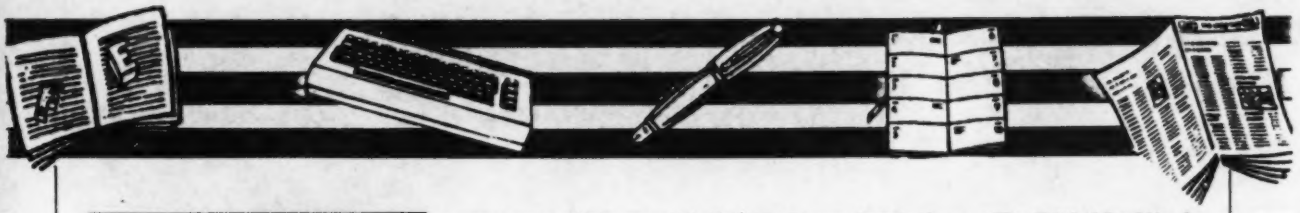
Price: £3.95

ISBN 0 946745 70 6

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this moving collection of twenty short stories about family life. The stories are very well written and convey the complex relationships that make up family life. They are both humorous and sad, and range from stories about childhood experiences to those associated with death and old age. Sharing family experiences provides an opportunity to appreciate cultural and social class differences as well as regional differences between people, and the stories in this book lend themselves to the type of discussion-based work which can be developed around this theme. When we look at family life, we take a look at ourselves and each other, and the family can be a rich resource for student-centred learning and reminiscence work.

As an individual reading book students might well find the level of reading difficult, but the stories are not long and could be used as a stimulus for group discussion and written work, or put onto tapes to which students can listen individually.

Susan Henderson
County Co-ordinator for Adult Basic Education
Northamptonshire Education Authority



Unscrambling Spelling

by Cynthia Klein and Robin R. Millar

Published by Hodder & Stoughton

Price: £15.00

ISBN 0 340 51234 2

This book is divided into two parts. Part 1 gives a summary of current theories and methods behind the teaching of spelling. It advises the use of a variety of learning strategies but goes on to advocate the 'individualised spelling programme' which is largely based on the Look, Cover, Write, Check method. It states that spelling can be taught through the medium of students' writing.

Part 2 is a series of 17 photocopiable resource sheets for use with students. It is in this section of the book that I believe the authors have assumed a rather narrow view of students' problems. For instance, they do not mention students with special needs or ESOL. The emphasis on group work could also be a problem in some settings. No mention is made of methods using computers. It includes only a sentence about word processing.

I feel that the resource sheets could, however, serve a useful purpose in a volunteer tutor training setting, but certainly for many of our students they would simply prove to be too difficult to read.

One other criticism is that the book assumes a rather stereotypical view of the student, ignoring social and political factors lying behind poor literacy skills (including spelling). Not all students would have the motivation to follow the programme as described.

However, the book is an excellent and useful summary of the teaching of spelling and I would certainly recommend it to augment other recent publications on the subject.

Andy Johnson
Lecturer
Cumbria Education Authority

The Skittle Match

ISBN 0 9515696 4 0

The Big Tomatoes

ISBN 0 9515696 1 6

The New Dress

ISBN 0 9515696 1 6

Well Done Betty

ISBN 0 9515696 2 4

by Jill Merer

Published by Avanti Books, 8 Parsons Green, Boulton Road, Pin Green Industrial Estate, Stevenage SG1 4QG.

Price: 95p each or £3.25 per set

These four books are for that most difficult of categories for which to cater – the adult beginner reader. They are all written at a similar level, although 'The Big Tomatoes' uses slightly longer words and more complicated sentence constructions. The characters in the stories are adults and the subject matter wholesome enough and of general interest: the buying of a new dress, taking a driving test, a skittle match and growing tomatoes for a show. The illustrations, however, do not make the characters sympathetic and interest level for the reader is not very high apart from in 'The Big Tomatoes'.

Unfortunately the punctuation of direct speech is incorrect throughout and, in an attempt to keep paragraphs short, there has been a somewhat arbitrary division of subject matter. Occasionally specialised words like 'flopper' are used and the sentence construction is not always helpful – 'the last hand and again it was Dave's turn'. 'The New Dress' is really of interest to female students only and has a slight anti-male tone, as does 'Well done Betty', whereas 'The Skittle Match' is of interest to males and females and 'The Big Tomatoes', the most interesting of the four, has a fairly wide application to males.

Jonquil Webster
Key Teacher
Cumbria LEA

Short Notices

Start Now – Beating Heart Disease

by Rachael Gooch

Published by Leeds City Council Printing & Publishing Unit

Price: £3.10 inc p&p

ISBN: 1 85659 062 3

Start Now is a set of twelve double-sided worksheets designed for use with the Health Education Booklet 'Beating Heart Disease' (also included with the pack). The worksheets are suitable for a range of abilities.

Asterix and the English Language – Books 1 & 2

by Christopher Hart

Published by Edward Arnold

Price: £3.25 each

ISBN: 0 340 50036 0
0 340 50035 2

Asterix and the English Language takes authentic unedited extracts from the original Asterix stories and presents them as reading texts for 'intermediate-level' learners. The extracts are linked with tasks which guide the reader through the text, develop reading skills and also develop in learners the ability to derive meaning from context and to revise various aspects of vocabulary and grammar. The books are likely to be of interest to those students who are Asterix fans.

The ALBSU Newsletter is published four times a year, in November, February, May and July. Copies are available, free, to organisations and individuals. We aim to publish articles of interest to those teaching in adult literacy, second language and basic skills, those who are responsible for funding and organising the provision, and those who are generally interested in these important areas of work.

If you have ideas on topics which you would like to see covered, please contact the Editor, at ALBSU. Reviews of relevant publications are written for the newsletter by practitioners, and we are interested to receive publications which could be useful in basic education.

Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit, Kingsbourne House, 229/231 High Holborn, London WC1V 7DA. Tel: 071-405 4017.

Design: Studio 21, Windsor. Printed: Chase Web Ltd, St Ives Plc

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